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IDOLATRY

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BY

ALICE PERRIN

AUTHOR OF "EAST OF SUEZ," "THE STRONGER CLAIM,"
"RED RECORDS," "THE WATERS OF DESTRUCTION,"
"A FREE SOLITUDE," ETC.



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Dedicated to
Sir Charles Euan-Smith, K.C.B.

IDOLATRY

CHAPTER I

"It's the devil!" said Sir Richard Crivener.

"It is," agreed Anne, his niece.

The pair were alone in the dining-room of a London house—one of the smaller houses in Eaton Place. The uncle, florid, burly, middle-aged, sat before an open bureau that was choked with papers. The niece, elegant, finished in appearance, having a confidence of bearing that gave her the effect of a maturity beyond her twenty-three years, stood by one of the windows. Her profile, with the sensitive curves of nose and chin, was traced sharply against the casement blind; her hair, of a deep mahogany-brown, reflected warmly the September sunshine that glowed through the silken material.

Sir Richard held a document in his hand. It was the last will and testament of his mother, Georgiana Lady Crivener, who, yesterday afternoon at two o'clock, had been borne away beneath a mound of white flowers, behind a pair of black horses, never to return.

"I declare I could hardly believe old Canfield wasn't lying, or that he hadn't made away with

the money himself when he told me how matters stood!" said Sir Richard plaintively. "Who would ever have suspected that she was spending her capital all this time? Did it ever strike *you*, Anne, that there was anything wrong?"

"I never thought about it. Why should I?" Anne felt as though the revelation made to her uncle in Mr. Canfield's office that morning, and subsequently to herself in this room, had paralysed her understanding. She turned from the window now, and pushed her hair up from her forehead in an effort to realise the unpleasant facts.

"Granny never discussed her affairs with me, or with any one else as far as I know," she went on. "But I think I understand how it happened. She couldn't bring herself to live any differently, so she just spent her capital and put all question of the future out of her thoughts. She had a wonderful capacity for ignoring disagreeables, big or little—she just shook her mind free of them." There was no hint of censure in Anne's voice—only regretful, indulgent remembrance. "Think how she entertained, how she kept up appearances! She loved comfort and luxury, too, and I don't blame her. We lived like other people of our own set as a matter of course. She gave me all I wanted, and had everything herself that she had always been accustomed to."

"And left you without a farthing! Well, she was my mother, and I suppose I oughtn't to say

anything against her now she's dead; but I do call it damned unfair, not only to you, Anne, but to me as well."

Anne listened with sympathetic attention. She liked and understood Uncle Richard, and this he recognized and appreciated vaguely. One of Anne's attractions was her tolerance, her power of perceiving the points of view of other people.

"You see," he threw down the will, and began to stride about the room, "if she'd even left me something decent I could have provided for you as far as it allowed, but there she goes," he pointed to the sheet of paper, "and makes me sole executor and legatee, and charges me with the care of 'her beloved granddaughter Anne Crivener,' and leaves practically nothing! This will was made years ago —when she settled in London. She was always a fool about money, and I suppose she had an idea she might muddle her affairs sooner or later, and thought this'd be the best thing for you if she died in difficulties. It sounds plausible to outsiders, too, and doesn't give her away. By Jove, it's lucky for her sake she snuffed out when she did, poor old lady! From what Canfield tells me, there may be a couple of thousand or so left after everything's cleared up, and, though I don't deny that even *a hundred* or two would be deuced useful to *my* pocket, whatever there is shall be invested safely for you, of course. You'll have to come and live with us and make the best of a bad job. Only remember, Anne,

my dear, your Aunt Agnes holds the purse-strings —not your Uncle Richard, worse luck!"

Anne smiled. "Yes. And, unfortunately, Aunt Agnes dislikes me as much as I dislike her. Now, if I had only known what was going to happen I might have made friends with her; but I'm afraid it's too late now, as far as she is concerned."

Sir Richard rubbed the top of his head where red skin was beginning to show through crinkly black hair. "It's damned unpleasant sometimes to be dependent, but when you're broke it's just as well to have somebody you *can* be dependent on. Where should I be now without Agnes's money? Not at Crivener Court, you may bet your best hat! I must have sold Crivener if Agnes hadn't been kind enough to marry me. Under the circumstances, of course, I can't dictate to Agnes, but as I'm your guardian under the old lady's will she'll give you a home if only for shame's sake. The old lady counted on *that* right enough! You'll just come and live with us, my dear, though whether you'll enjoy yourself depends on Agnes and the way you take her!"

He chuckled with faintly malicious satisfaction that another should be placed in somewhat the same ambiguous position as himself. It did not occur to him to expect gratitude from his niece. In his opinion she had deuced little for which to be grateful!—regarded hitherto by every one as her grandmother's heiress, it was infernal hard luck on the

girl to find herself dependent on her uncle's rich wife! It was shameful that his mother should have done this thing; and yet, knowing the old lady's character as did he and Anne so well, it really was not very astonishing.

Lady Crivener had never condescended to detail in business any more than she had attended to items of house-keeping. Always fiercely antagonistic to the dissection of "ways and means," she had dubbed it "common" to worry about money. When left a widow she gave up everything but her private income to Richard, who, like the rest of their world, never doubted but that his mother was "quite comfortably off." He paid his debts, and spent the remainder of his father's money, and then induced the only child of a rich manufacturer to marry him—whereupon Georgiana Lady Crivener went to live in London and said, with unanswerable decisiveness, that her own fortune was more than sufficient, thank you, for the requirements of herself and her granddaughter, the child of her dead son.

But there Lady Crivener was mistaken. She did not understand the value of money; in her generation few women had any practical knowledge of finance; and her "own fortune" proved anything but sufficient for the manner in which she had always lived, and always intended to live.

This, Mr. Canfield, her lawyer, explained to her a few years later. "Sell out something, then, and don't argue," she ordered. And, again, when more

money was needed, "Sell out something, and hold your tongue!" Put down her carriage? Dismiss her men-servants? Retire to a small house in the country? The fellow was a chattering fool—how dared he dictate to *her?* And she continued to live luxuriously, if not in state, in the house in Eaton-place; gave excellent, rather old-fashioned dinners and luncheons, and exclusive At Homes; went abroad to the best hotels; and held her own valiantly in the position to which she had been born, for her own family was even older, more stiff-necked, more decayed than the Criveners themselves.

Anne's childhood had been passed at Crivener Court under the guidance of a succession of progressive governesses. She knew that her father had died just before her birth—his memorial tablet was fixed above the family pew in Crivener Church—and she had always believed, up to the time of her Uncle Richard's marriage, when she and old Lady Crivener had removed to London, that her mother had died abroad while she herself was yet a baby. But, on her seventeenth birthday, her grandmother had given her a string of family pearls, and acquainted her with the disconcerting intelligence that Philip Crivener's widow was still alive. "Though her name," Lady Crivener had added with cold contempt, "is now, I believe, Williams."

The communication had not affected Anne very deeply. She had only felt anxious to conceal the

rather unpleasant fact of her indifferent birth on her mother's side. It had not been agreeable to learn that her father, Captain Crivener, had come back from India married to a wife who was entirely out of his own class—a little insignificant "nobody," the daughter of a missionary, having neither connections nor money, nothing in the world to her advantage save a singularly pretty face. It was a relief to Anne, rather than otherwise, to know that her mother had given her over voluntarily as an infant to the Crivener family, and returned to mission life in India, where, soon afterwards, she had married again—"a gentleman," she had written, "of the name of Williams." Then, apparently, Mrs. Williams had forgotten all about her offspring in England, for, beyond the letter that announced her second marriage, nothing further had been heard of her by the Criveners, who felt under no necessity to make inquiries.

Anne, now listening with dubious acquiescence to her uncle's plans for her future, of a sudden remembered her mother—remembered the day on which she had been told that her mother was alive; and she recalled, vividly, how the history of her father's "undesirable marriage" had clouded her first grown-up birthday. Also she pictured the little black and white box made of porcupine quills, given her at the same time by her grandmother. It contained her father's watch and signet ring, a couple of tie-pins, and some handsome waistcoat

buttons, besides the letter that had announced Mrs. Crivener's second marriage, and a faded photograph of a girl with her hair drawn away from her forehead and arranged in a tight knob at the back of her head; her dress buttoned all the way down the front and fitted shockingly about the waist and shoulders. Anne, disgusted with the photograph, had flung it back with untender haste into the box, which she had never since opened.

Sir Richard interrupted her thoughts. "I daresay you'll marry," he said hopefully. "Agnes and I often wonder why you haven't married—you, with your looks and accomplishments, and, until now, your prospects!"

"I never saw why I should marry," said Anne, a little disdain in her voice. "There seemed no necessity," she added more humbly.

"No. But still a girl like you don't arrive at your age—you've been out a good five years—Anne, without love affairs. Now, isn't there any decent fellow you could whistle back to your side? Say you'd changed your mind, or that your grandmother's death sets you free to please yourself, or that you'd come to look on matters from a different point of view—that sort of thing, eh? Really, my dear girl, I'm certain you'd prefer a home of your own, whatever the man was like, to living with Agnes on sufferance!"

Sir Richard lit a cigar, and looked with anxious interrogation at his niece. By Jove! he thought,

she was a handsome girl! She ought to have married well, too, long before this, with her undeniably good looks and the thoroughbred air; not a trace of the maternal strain about her—she was a Crivener woman all over.

"Oh! yes," she said presently, with indifference in her eyes, "I've had proposals, some of them quite good ones, I suppose, and refused them. I feel on that point rather as I feel about Aunt Agnes—if I had only known what was going to happen I might have behaved differently! Now, I'm afraid, all the rich rejected have consoled themselves, while the detrimentals will feel thankful they escaped when they hear of Miss Crivener's change of fortune." She laughed and sat down, resting her elbows on the table and her chin on her clasped knuckles.

"It's nothing to laugh at, I can tell you!" Sir Richard's concern for his niece's future rendered him quite testy. "Supposing I died, and Agnes died, what would become of you? *Agnes* won't leave you any money!" He seemed as much agitated as though Anne's existence depended upon an immediate wedding. "You don't half realise how you're placed, you silly gell!"

"I realise how I'm placed only too well," she answered quietly, "but plans can't be decided all in a moment. I quite agree with you that marriage would be the best way out of the difficulty, but until a suitable husband presents himself I don't see

what I can do but go back with you to Crivener. Don't worry, Uncle Richard; something will turn up. Perhaps, after all, I may manage to get on well with Aunt Agnes. It's a pity you have no children that I could help look after, though I hate children and should make a shocking bad governess."

"Good heavens, yes! And don't talk to Agnes about being a governess or she'll have twenty fits. I don't see why you shouldn't get the right side of her; I'm sure you'll do your best any way. You always hit it off well enough with the poor old lady, and *she* wasn't altogether easy to live with, heh?"

"She was fond of me, in her own odd way," said Anne sadly, "and I of her. Then you see," she added, her voice hardening, "we had the same tastes. We both loved society and amusement and comfort, and hated sentiment and poverty and anything in the form of self-denial."

Sir Richard glanced at her with vague suspicion. "Oh! come now!" he said, doubtful if she were not joking.

But Anne was far from joking. She felt nearer to tears as recollections of her dauntless old kinswoman surged through her brain—the worldly-wise Granny, gone out of her life for ever, from whom she had learnt tolerance, good manners, self-control; who had drilled her in the art of being agreeable without trouble to herself; of being polite and punctilious without going to any great personal incon-

venience; of evading tiresome obligations and engagements by the manufacture of such excuses as would please and convince instead of causing offence—all the little niceties of the craft of humbug that ensure exemption from boredom and yet make for pleasant and profitable popularity.

Fragments of Granny's teachings flitted vaguely through her mind. She could almost hear the cultured, unemotional voice:—"Remember, my love, we may be as rude as we please if we do it politely. . . . Encourage the man who takes you in to dinner to talk of what interests him, not of what interests you; this is entirely to your own advantage, for your hostess will observe that he enjoyed himself and will be grateful to you, while the man will tell every one he meets how charming and clever you are. . . . Never interrupt a story you have heard before by saying so; listen with attention and laugh at the right moment, not before, so making yourself pleasant instead of odious. . . ."

Anne pushed back her chair and rose abruptly. "Heavens! how I shall miss her!" she thought. But to Uncle Richard she said:—"Don't you think I had better go upstairs and see what Stokes is doing?"

"Perhaps you had. And act as you think best about the clothes and all the odds and ends. Of course, keep anything you think would be useful to you, and give the rest to the maid—to Stokes. As to the jewelry," he hesitated uncomfortably. "I'm

afraid I shall have to consult Agnes about that first. I believe it's usual for the son's wife to have the jewelry when there are no daughters." (Anne recognised this as the creed of Agnes.) "The same about the furniture." He looked round the room at the Chippendale chairs and sideboard, the beautiful Venetian mirror over the mantelpiece, the old French bureau at which he had been sitting, the bronzes, the pictures, the china. "The mother took a good lot away from Crivener, and I suppose we ought to see what Agnes would like to keep before we sell anything?"

"Oh! of course," agreed Anne; and her uncle's relief was patent.

Then she went upstairs to the big bedroom that had been her grandmother's, and there found Stokes surrounded by dresses of silk, and satin, and velvet; bonnets and toques with flowers and feathers and trimmings, all of the gayest hues, for the dead woman had loved bright colours and had worn them triumphantly to the last. Particularly had she affected a certain shade of blue—in her youth it had matched the blue of her eyes.

"I have put all the lace together *there*," said Stokes, "and all the furs *there*." She pointed with an ostentatious air of virtue to a white heap and a dark heap on the bed; then cast proprietary eyes upon the handsome gowns that hung over the backs of chairs and lay along the chintz-covered couch. Stokes was an elderly woman with boot-black hair,

and a consequential manner which implied that she knew her place thoroughly despite the fact that she was so much above it.

"We will divide those," said Anne, calmly authoritative; and waved her hand towards the clothing.

Stokes' black eyes seemed to bolt from her head. Could she believe her own hearing? Miss Crivener might be exacting, impatient, inconsiderate towards those whom she deemed were beneath her, but from "Mrs." Stokes herself, and Mr. Swill, the butler, down to the humble boot boy and kitchen maid, none had ever found occasion to call her *mean*—she had always been the lady whatever her faults. And now——!

Anne moved to the satin-wood dressing table, picked up a hand-glass and surveyed the back of her carefully dressed head, the while she considered how best to deal with Stokes. Certainly it would be more comfortable to remain on good terms, if not to make friends with the woman. She laid down the hand-glass.

"Stokes," she said confidentially. "I dare say you, like many other people, imagine that her ladyship has left me all her money?"

"Well, Miss—ahem," rejoined Stokes with discretion, and began to fold up a blue dressing-jacket.

"Then listen to me," continued Miss Crivener, "it has turned out that she had little or nothing

to leave. All her money was lost shortly before her death."

"Oh, Miss!" gasped Stokes, and dropped the dressing-jacket. "You may depend upon it that's what 'astened her end—and she, poor lady, keeping the bad news to herself!"

Anne sighed significantly.

"And you, Miss?" Stokes ventured, with respectful curiosity.

"Of course Sir Richard will do all he can for me, but, as you probably know, he is not well-off himself, though Lady Crivener is rich." Then she searched her vocabulary for words that would most impress her audience:—"I feel that I may not care to find myself beholden to others for everything"—she began.

"No, indeed, Miss," interrupted Stokes with eager sympathy, "no one can understand that better nor me, seeing it was the reason I myself went into service! and the only one of my family to do so." Her manner was one dark hint of a false position and unmerited misfortune.

"Then I can speak freely to you, Stokes, and I am sure whatever I say will go no further. I should not like anything repeated downstairs." Stokes was horrified at the idea of such a vulgar possibility! "Everything in the house belongs to Sir Richard," continued Anne, amused at her successful capture of Stokes' good will, "even these clothes! But he says I may do what I like with

them, so I am going to share them with you because I have very little money of my own at present—her ladyship paid all my bills herself—and perhaps you can help me to sell what is of no use to me?"

With emotional zest Stokes proffered the benefit of a long experience in this direction. Also she was volubly anxious that the young lady should retain the whole of the wardrobe—Stokes was a kind-hearted being—but on this point Miss Crivener was firm; the spoil should be divided fairly, or (effectual threat) the advice and assistance of Amelia Stokes would not be accepted.

The two were now in complete accord, and the afternoon was passed in emptying drawers and cupboards, sorting, counting, dividing. It was a painful occupation, for almost every moment revived fresh memories of the dead woman who had enjoyed her life, indulged her vanity, pleased herself without consideration for her fellow-creatures, and yet had been a remarkable and attractive personality with her independence of character, her wit and tact, her pride and reticence.

Stokes was tearful throughout the proceedings. She had admired and respected her despotic old mistress, and she broke down altogether when she drew from its box a glossy white wig and held it up for Anne's inspection.

"This was the second best," she sobbed, "m'lady went to her grave in the new one!"

CHAPTER II

THE process of unravelling Lady Crivener's affairs moved slowly. Lawyers, papers, creditors, correspondence, filled the hours; situations had to be found for servants, suitable homes for the two black pugs; arrangements were being made for the ultimate sale of the furniture, and strenuous efforts for the disposal of the lease of the house.

But Sir Richard refused to write letters or grant interviews after four o'clock in the afternoon. He liked to stroll in the deserted park with Anne, or go to his club where he could look at the papers if he met but few friends; and sometimes he turned in at Tattersall's, where he sold his mother's pair of carriage-horses for a better price than he had expected "considering those foul motors." He hankered after a theatre or a music-hall, but Anne sternly suppressed the idea, though they dined a few times at some of the less important restaurants. Sir Richard grumbled mildly at "having to stay away from the partridges," but, on the other hand, he did not seem altogether sorry to have to stay away from Agnes, who, to the secret relief of both uncle and niece, was engrossed at Crivener with a family party. She was devoted to her own relations.

"I'm fond of Agnes, really," Sir Richard would explain to Anne earnestly, as though she would find a difficulty in believing such a statement, "and when I'm not with her I remember how good she is and what she's done for me, and how she's set the whole place on its legs and drained the village and all that; so perhaps it's just as well to have a bit of a separation now and then, eh? But I do wish she could manage not to rub me up the wrong way when we're together. You know she prides herself on speaking her mind, and somehow her mind always seems to be so confoundedly disagreeable when she does speak it!"

For Anne, the time that followed close on her grandmother's death, busy and trying though it was, seemed at least preferable to the prospect before her. London was comparatively empty; she could walk up Sloane-street with the two black pugs without encountering gay groups, blocking the pavement, of young married women and girl friends, whose easy, irresponsible lives had not been suddenly darkened; who, next year, would have forgotten Anne Crivener while they whirled about to luncheons, parties, dinners, theatres, balls, just as she and Granny had whirled about together for the last five seasons. She was spared the infliction of personal condolences and inquisitive questions—how they would all talk when they found out that Lady Crivener had left nothing to her granddaughter! Those who missed seeing the notice of the will in the papers

would be told of it by those who had been more observant. Anne remembered grimly the keen interest she and Granny had always taken in the wills of people they had known!

She was not too busy to contemplate her future—to recognise that she was to live as a dependent at Crivener, with, perhaps, a ridiculous little income for her clothes and that hers only through the generosity of her uncle; though, she told herself with a rueful smile, clothes would no longer be of much importance. Lady Crivener did not care for what, to Anne, meant society; she knew none of her late mother-in-law's "set," which she denounced loudly on every opportunity, partly, perhaps, because old Lady Crivener had never admitted her to the favoured circle. Of course, the girl reflected, it would be easy to pay visits later on, but the life led by herself and her grandmother had left little leisure for the making or keeping up of close friendships, and Anne did not appreciate the notion of appearing among her former associates in the humble *rôle* of the "poor girl," after having played leading lady as the granddaughter and heiress of Georgiana Lady Crivener.

There was also the possibility of marriage. But how humiliating, after having received the homage of eligible bachelors, while totally indifferent as to their intentions, to feel obliged to encourage, carefully, a likely swain in the anxious hope that he might be led to propose! Still, she supposed she

must make up her mind to it—provided she got the chance! That she might herself fall in love did not occur to her. Perhaps her natural impulses had been checked to a great extent by Granny's training; perhaps her heart was as yet like a tight bud that, under certain conditions, might blossom into splendid flower, or else remain hard and undeveloped, nipped by the chill of self-interest. Lady Crivener had never urged her granddaughter to marry. When Anne came out she had admonished the girl to behave like a gentlewoman, never to make herself conspicuous with men, to permit attentions only from admirers who were of the right stamp; and then, seeing that interference would not be necessary, she had asked no questions, and concerned herself not at all with Anne's flirtations.

Now that the question of matrimony had become of importance to her, Anne decided that if she married at all she would marry well and, moreover, in her own class, if not above it—none of Aunt Agnes's impossible though opulent men friends or relations should tempt her—otherwise she would remain at Crivener and make the most of the material advantages that there, at least, were a certainty —good food, a comfortable bedroom, and every modern luxury.

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Anne packed her clothes herself (for the first time in her life) the day before she and Sir Richard were to leave London. Stokes had gone, having

taken another situation under protest—nothing but mysterious family difficulties drove her to remain in service at all. She was to receive fifty pounds a year, "everything found," and "the wardrobe," from a lady who had known Stokes's late mistress for many years—who now seized a possible opportunity of ascertaining what she had long ached to know—*i. e.*, Lady Crivener's exact age and income, whether her jewels were real or paste, whether her beautiful white hair was her own or a wig, besides sundry other interesting details concerning the late establishment in Eaton-place.

Thanks to the exertions and experience of Stokes, Anne owned a purse full of notes and sovereigns in place of her share of her grandmother's clothes. Also she had a fair stock of gowns and hats of her own that would still be sufficiently up-to-date when she left off her mourning. Then there was Granny's lace and the set of sables—Sir Richard had cried, "Keep 'em, keep 'em!" and there really seemed no need to consult Aunt Agnes in this matter! Granny's underclothing all fitted Anne well enough and constituted a valuable hoard, since everything the old lady possessed was of the finest quality. So, in the matter of her wardrobe, Anne felt she need have no anxiety for a long time to come; and she packed her dainty raiment in her own and the best of Granny's trunks, feeling somewhat in the position of a captain provisioning his ship for a lengthy and uncertain voyage.

Her heart gave a little quiver as she looked around the room but lately so pretty and bright, now bare of all save furniture and boxes, and realised that to-night she would be sleeping in it for the last time. The silver toilet set, the little pictures, knick-knacks, photographs, books, would never again be set out here, and to-morrow the familiar white suite, and the French bed, and the cosy couch and arm-chair would all be taken off to the pantechnicon with the rest of the furniture to await Lady Crivener's orders as to what was to be kept and what sold. Anne rebuked herself for these sentimental feelings; she opened a drawer with a determined jerk and began to disentangle scraps of ribbon and lace, pieces of trimming and embroidery, soiled gloves (worth cleaning now), an accumulation of odds and ends that she had intended, for an indefinite period, to "go through when she had time."

At the very back of the drawer, pushed away behind the rubbish, she came upon the little square box, made of porcupine quills. After a moment's hesitation she opened it and saw the queer, old-fashioned photographs she had scorned six years ago, the letter in a narrow, faded envelope with an Indian stamp, and the trinkets that had belonged to her father. Deliberately, now, she took up the photograph and studied it. How absurd it looked! The self-conscious pose against a balustrade, with an indefinite background of trees and pillars; the strained hair, the atrocious gown, the glimpse of a

broad boot. But—Anne looked closer—the girl's face was beautiful! She covered the hair and the figure with her fingers and noted the beauty of the innocent, pathetic eyes, set wide apart below delicate, arched eyebrows; the classic nose, the bow-shaped mouth, and little, pointed chin.

Anne wondered no longer at her father's infatuation for the missionary's daughter. She guessed dimly at the mental discomfort the poor little creature must have endured when she came to England to live among her husband's people—the silent slights, the quiet contempt; the help withheld in social difficulties; the notice, without kindly correction, of mistakes; the hundred little negative cruelties of which, Anne knew very well, the members of Granny's world were capable towards one not of themselves. Then, left to their mercy, without the love and support of her young husband, the widow had fled, back to her own kin, deeming the surrender of her baby a price worth paying for her freedom. Anne drew out the letter with a smile of half-amused sympathy, and read it. The date was twenty-two years ago, and the address, *Sika, N.W.P., India.* The handwriting was clear and round, rather childish, with a tilt backwards.

"DEAR LADY CRIVENER.

"I am writing to tell you I am married again, to a gentleman of the name of Williams. He is a widower with one daughter of eleven years old.

He is an old friend of my father's, and himself a missionary. This address will always find me unless I write you to the contrary, as Mr. Williams intends to continue his work here among the heathen as long as life and health are spared to him. I hope Anne is well.

"Yours truly,

"MARY WILLIAMS.

"P. S.—Should anything happen to me, Mr. Williams would at once communicate with you."

Anne sighed, involuntarily, as she read the last words of this chill, repressed little letter. Its very baldness argued smothered emotion which the writer had either been unwilling or forbidden to express. Anne thought it read as if dictated by Mr. Williams.

The letter disturbed her strangely. Her ready imagination saw the woman settling down, while still hardly more than a girl, to a narrow, monotonous life of duty and self-denial—the one romance of her young heart buried deep out of sight; all remembrance, emotion, regret, stifled and crushed; the eventful chapter closed as though it had never been written. Of a sudden an impulse assailed Anne to write to her mother, but the next moment she repulsed it. What good would it do either of them? For Mrs. Williams it might only stir up old memories and so bring unhappiness—for Anne, it might

bring about an appeal that she would join her mother and step-father—the last course she intended to pursue! She put back the letter in the box, which she packed among other sundries that might some day be wanted, and then she tried to forget the letter, and the photograph, and the emotions that both had called up.

But she felt restless, she could no longer sort out her possessions with any method, and finally she put on her hat and gloves and sought her uncle to ask him if he felt inclined for a stroll.

Sir Richard was finishing last papers and could not get out. But he suggested that if Anne, like a good gell, would take a letter for him to a beast in Victoria street which ought to have gone yesterday —only he had such an infernal lot to do. Anne said certainly, she would be very glad of a walk with an object; whereupon Sir Richard declared that there was no accounting for tastes, and what was his name? Anne laughed with kindly forbearance, and went out into the dusty September sunshine, sorrowful to think that probably this would be her last walk in London for many a day.

Having delivered the letter it occurred to her to return through St. James's Park; she realised suddenly that she had never been inside St. James's Park. Some one had said that there was a lake, and that the grass and trees were beautiful—she would go and see for herself.

"Miss Crivener."

She looked up into a pair of fervid, generous blue eyes several inches above her own.

"Oh!" she cried, relief and pleasure in her voice. "Captain Devasse!"

There was no one she would rather have met at this moment, if she was to meet an acquaintance at all. Handsome, ineligible, Dion Devasse with whom she had flirted safely and conveniently throughout the last two seasons, who was such an excellent specimen of his type—that of the well-bred, unaffected, but not highly intellectual British soldier. He was no gossip; other people's affairs interested him little, except in so far as they might claim his ready compassion or sympathy. He was tender hearted, though weak only where women were concerned, and especially was he weak about Anne Crivener. His delight at seeing her was evident, but characteristically he was also unable to conceal his embarrassment at feeling obliged to condole with her in person on her recent loss; his letter had been written with care and labour at the proper time.

"You know—how sorry I am"—he stammered nervously, and looked away as though he feared she might break into tears. "She was such a favourite, you will miss her so dreadfully—we all shall."

"Yes. Poor Granny!" said Anne, speaking naturally, "but she died just the sort of death she would have wished for herself—quick and sudden; quite well one day, and gone the next. We had stayed in London rather late this year, and were

just packing up to pay visits when she was taken ill. I really don't think she knew anything at all about it, and I can't be too thankful."

"Ah! that was best, if it was to happen at all. I quite agree with you." He looked again into her eyes, his embarrassment dispelled by her frankness. "Where were you going? Into the Park? May I come too? I've a lot to tell you."

They strolled together along the gravel path.

"I am going to India," he said abruptly, and watched her face in feverish anxiety. She neither paled nor coloured.

"To India? You will like that,—but," she sighed, "it's a long way off." He was a link with her old life; she felt she would miss him. "When do you go?"

"Almost at once. I'm in town now getting my kit. The whole of to-day I've been losing my temper at the Army and Navy Stores."

"I am sorry you are going."

This was indiscreet. Devasse began an eager, incoherent sentence which Anne interrupted purposely.

"I shan't see much of any of my friends now," she said. "As you are going away so soon, and as I know you don't gloat over other people's misfortunes, I should like to tell you what has happened. Poor Granny had somehow got through all her money, and I'm practically dependent on my Uncle and Aunt, Sir Richard and Lady Crivener."

He was silent for a moment absorbing her words. Dion Devasse could not think quickly. Then he snatched at her hand. "Anne!" he cried tempestuously, "Anne, darling! come to India with me—marry me, Anne. Ah! *do*—you know I have always loved you!"

She gave his hand a kind little squeeze and shook it from hers gently. "Dion," she said, "why have you never asked me before? Because you were poor and you thought I was going to be rich when Granny died. Yes, I know it was that without your telling me. Your face speaks so plainly, dear old Dion, it can't lie! But it's no use. I can't marry you, Dion."

"Why not—why not? I know I've hardly any money besides my pay, but we could rub along; other fellows in the regiment have married without private means, and they manage; and India's cheap to live in. People tell me you can have much more for your money there than in England. I wouldn't play polo, or race, or go in for anything expensive, Anne, I promise you!"

She almost laughed, but checked herself—he was so ardent, so humble, so pitiably in love! She wondered, supposing she had indeed loved him, if she could have brought herself to share his comparative poverty; could she have screwed and scraped to keep out of debt, done without all the bodily comfort to which she had always been accustomed, faced a life of struggle combined with obscurity?

She doubted it. And certainly, since she did not love him, she had no intention of trying! Anne shook her head with gentle determination, and for the next few moments Dion raved and entreated and argued, till at last, convinced by her words and manner, he relapsed into despairing silence.

"Dion, don't be miserable! You would be much more miserable if I were to marry you knowing I could never care for you."

"If I were rich, if I had a place in the country, and a house in town, and a yacht and a moor, and a dozen motor-cars, and all the rest of it—would you marry me then?" he burst out fiercely; and the next moment was abjectly penitent. "Ah! forgive me, Anne! I am a beast. I don't wonder you can't care for me. I *know* you are not the kind of girl to sell yourself, and I wouldn't wish any woman to marry me unless she loved me, however much I cared for her. I know if you loved a fellow his circumstances would make no difference to you."

Anne smiled sweetly and said nothing. Probably he would not have believed her even had she told him the truth—*i. e.,* that were he rich she would marry him without hesitation, or failing him, for she liked him truly and admired his good looks, any other man of her own world who had a sufficient income to give her all she wanted.

His dejection was so poignant that she had not the heart to leave him till she had made an effort to cheer and distract him.

"Dion, cheer up! you are no worse off than you were before you met me just now. You knew all along that I wasn't in love with you. To be honest, I have never been in love in my life, and I don't believe it will ever come to me."

He brightened. "Well, it's some consolation to know that you don't care about any one else if I haven't a chance! Dog in the mangerish, isn't it? You'll let me write to you sometimes, won't you—and you'll write to me?"

"Yes, if you like. What will your address be in India?"

"Sika," he said, "Sika, U.P., India. It's U.P. now I'm told, instead of N.W.P. The former sounds more in keeping with my state of mind, though I haven't a notion what any of the letters mean."

Anne paid no heed to the latter part of his speech. She was gazing thoughtfully before her, and in her mind the address swung backwards and forwards. "Sika, N.W.P., India." That was what she had read at the top of her mother's letter only an hour or so ago! Should she tell him the story and ask him to let her know, when he got out there, if Mr. and Mrs. Williams still lived at Sika, and to tell her all about them? A shrinking reluctance held her silent. She feared to know the worst—to gather from Dion's letter that the Williams were impossible, perhaps to learn that she had a large number of step-brothers and sisters! Also she felt loth that

even Dion, to whom it would make no difference, should know of her father's mistake. No good could come of raking up the story? possibly only mortification to herself.

"Sika," she repeated absently, "N. W. P., India."

"No," corrected her companion, "*U.P.*, India. Think of 'all u.p.,'" he added in a dismal voice. Then, after a heavy pause: "Do you know, Anne, I think I *won't* write to you—unless I'm dying, or going to be married to somebody else, or anything that at present seems equally impossible. India is the country for soldiering; I shall throw myself heart and soul into my profession, make it take the place of wife, and family, and home, and all that, in my life. I believe if I had letters from you I should always be hoping and wishing, and thinking, and feeling unsettled. It had better be nothing as it can't be all—I know I explain myself badly, but——"

"But I understand," said Anne, "and I think you are right." She turned in the direction of Buckingham Gate. "I must go back now; I've still got heaps to do. We leave London to-morrow, and, as far as I can see, I shall never come back! Have you anything to do? Will you walk back with me as far as Eaton-place?"

"I would walk with you to Heaven or Hell," he answered tragically; and Anne smothered a smile.

CHAPTER III

SIKA, the sacred Hindu city, lay rosy, mellow, languorous in the sunset; but day dies so swiftly in the East that soon the rich colouring would fade into filmy greys, and blacken into darkness till, later, the moon would touch with a great light the bosom of the holy river, and gild the flights of shallow steps, the temples, spires, and palaces that crescented the water's edge.

Captain Devasse intended to avoid the damp vapour that presently would roll over the surface of the Ganges, and veil the flat plain of the opposite shore. His first year in India had taught him that this sunset mist was dangerous, fever-laden. Yet, as the sun sank, he still lingered on the narrow landing-stage, viewing with half-contemptuous wonder his strange surroundings—strange to him, seeing that, though he had arrived in India nearly twelve months ago, this was his first visit to the river front of the city.

At his feet rocked a multitude of small boats and rafts crowded with squatting native figures. Out over the water's edge jutted hundreds of little bamboo platforms for the purpose of prayer and meditation, and these also bore silent, motionless forms.

Large umbrellas made of dried leaves or grass, stationary and unclosable, made circles, and groups of circles, in every direction; and beneath them clustered priest and worshipper of many a bewildering sect. Up and down the worn, crumbling steps that rose to the walls of temple and habitation came and went a throng of human beings draped in dyed garments—saffron, orange, rose—hung about with garlands of blossoms, jessamine, tube-rose, and the pungent-scented marigold. From the building at the summit of the steps issued mingled sounds of high, minor chanting, weird and monotonous; the regular beat of drums, the discordant bray of shells and horns, the clamour of gongs. It was the hour of evening prayer, and praise, and invocation.

The living kaleidoscope was almost dazzling to the Englishman's vision. All that seemed to stand clear from the confused mass of dark faces and vivid splashes of colour, were grotesque beings with naked, ash-smeared bodies, and long, loathsome locks, in violent contrast to groups of dignified figures with shaven heads, austere, high-caste features, and passionless eyes, countenances that summoned involuntarily to the mind of Dion Devasse confused, far-off memories of the British Museum, and Egyptian mummies, the Book of the Dead, and Wise Men from the East, though he could not have explained why.

He watched and listened for a few moments longer; then, with a puzzled frown on his face, he

walked slowly up the tiers of steps with careless carriage, tall and ruddy, very British, very assured, unquestionably well favoured. How modern he looked in riding breeches and gaiters, light tweed coat, and the latest straw hat, threading his way through this assemblage of a people given over to reverence of the past, fettered by tradition, bound down by the axioms of ancestors.

Devasse had been sight-seeing that afternoon. He was not of an enterprising disposition, but he had at last been impelled by a certain unwilling curiosity to discover for himself why the river front of the native city should be considered such a remarkable sight. The native population held for him no particular interest. He knew nothing of the history, religions, or races of India; was hardly even aware that there was much to know beyond such events as were associated with the British army in the country. The Black Hole of Calcutta, Plassy, Panipat, Seringapatam, the first Afghan war, Chillianwallah, the Mutiny—these were familiar realities to him; but his knowledge of previous happenings was shadowy, his notion of the difference between Hindu and Mohammedan confused, and he was practically insensible to the old civilisations of the people. To him, as yet, natives were all "niggers," and though his nature was too generous to permit of his beating and abusing his servants because he was unable to make his orders intelligible, there was little distinction in his mind

between the high-caste Brahmin priest who moved aside with suppressed disgust to allow him to pass at this moment, and the meanest coolie on the road.

Still, he had now "done" the famous river's edge; and could say he had done it thoroughly when people bothered him about it. He had chartered a boat and floated along with the turbid current to watch the bright-hued throng of worshippers washing away their sins in the sacred water, praying, meditating, magnifying their gods. He had gazed curiously upon the burning ground with its funeral pyres, and processions of mourners, and curls of smoke that expressed by their volume the wealth or the poverty of the deceased. And now, as he came away, he was conscious of a dim suspicion that it all meant more than he had actually seen; that he had not merely beheld a picturesque heathen crowd performing absurd rites and useless ceremonials, but a symbolism of something, to him, unfathomable, and annoyingly mysterious. Of a sudden he felt anxious to get away quickly, to be outside this atmosphere that stifled him mentally and physically, to escape from the noise of gongs and chants, the cries of prayer and praise—from the sight of dark faces, and the scent of dying flowers, camphor, musk, and spice.

As he turned into the street where he had left his pony and groom, he found his way blocked by a group of natives, all staring with patient Oriental curiosity at a figure that declaimed in their midst

from the summit of a block of stone—a block that perhaps in former ages had been an image of the Great Lord Buddha himself, but was now a shapeless corrugated lump. Devasse paused involuntarily on the outskirts of the little congregation to gaze and listen almost as though he had been one of themselves, for the man who was preaching from this improvised pulpit was an Englishman—an Englishman of about his own age—with a face expressive of singular intentness and enthusiasm. The low rays of the sinking sun struck the severe outline of the missionary's bare head; the voice, uttering in fluent Hindustani, was rich and full, and as Captain Devasse met the glance of watchful grey eyes so clear as to seem almost white beneath the dark brows, he felt the magnetism of a personality such as he had never before encountered.

He pushed on to find his pony, carrying with him an impression curiously antithetical to all he had witnessed on the river's edge that afternoon. The preacher's face and voice had stirred within him an indefinable sense of mystery, as had the sight of the praying crowd he had just left, but he recognised that the second influence was essentially different from the first, that its origin was in something higher, purer, more noble! He felt puzzled by his own sensations and not a little impatient with them. Why should he be so affected by this example of his national faith as opposed to idolatry, when any amount of customary "church" at home had

failed to arouse in him the smallest emotion? When he got outside the city he felt it to be quite a relief to see Stapely, the Judge, riding slowly along the broad road that led to Civil lines and cantonments; here at least was a distraction from these perplexing and unaccustomed reflections, and he hailed the civilian with a friendly "Halloo!" though their acquaintanceship was of the slightest.

Griffith Stapely checked his big waler mare and looked around—a man with a long, narrow face, an impassive profile, and sombre brown eyes. His pith hat was too large for him, his grey suit was shapeless, he sat his horse awkwardly. In appearance he presented a complete contrast to Devasse, who trotted up so cordially confident that Stapely must be glad of company. Stapely was not equally cordial. He had no desire to escape from his own thoughts which had been given over wholly to a chapter of the book he was writing on "Crime among the Hindus"—a difficult chapter involving much patient thought, labour, and research. Probably it would give him more trouble than any other section of the work. He had come out this evening for a solitary ride to ponder over its details, and now, just as the right thoughts, encouraged by quiet opportunity, had begun to venture into his brain, this puppy of a soldier must needs overtake him and cause the ideas to disperse like birds scattered in sudden alarm. Yet, annoyed as he was, he could not but admire the effect of health, and vigour,

and triumph of manhood conveyed by the intruder. The sight of the strong, easily-poised figure, the healthy skin, bold features, vivid blue eyes, and true chestnut warmth of hair and moustache, gave the elder man the same sense of involuntary appreciation that he might have experienced in looking upon a splendid animal in the prime and perfection of its symmetry and gloss.

"Just been doing the river!" said Devasse cheerily; and ranged his neat polo pony alongside the gaunt waler.

"Ah!" said Mr. Stapely, without interest.

"Yes. They were all hard at it, burning their dead, and praying, and bathing, and chanting, and going on anyhow. An extraordinary show! It made me feel quite queer." He glanced with interrogation at his reluctant companion: "I suppose, now, you really understand these people and their jiggery-pokery? What do they mean by it all?"

"What do we mean by baptism, and the Sacrament, and the Lord's Day, and the rest of it?" responded the other drily.

"Oh! well, at any rate we ain't idolaters; though I must say I noticed enough reverence and devotion this afternoon to put many of us to shame!"

"Religious observance in the East is not always to be confounded with virtue," said Stapely; after a slight pause he added, "any more than it is in the West. 'To patter a creed,'" he quoted ab-

sently, "'to lie prone upon the ground in terror can avail nothing in the sight of God.'"

As though to close the subject he turned his head aside, and gazed between the thick trunks of the mango trees that bordered the road, out over the bright, autumn crops spreading like a green and yellow carpet to the hazy horizon. Devasse felt he was being snubbed, and resented the unfriendliness. What a sulky, unsociable beast! Impossible to tell what he really thought about anything. Dion glanced at the sharp outline of neck and jaw turned ungraciously towards him, and with vengeful persistence continued to talk.

"I'm glad I've seen for myself what it was like, at last. Disgraceful, of course, to have been close on a year in the place without going near the chief sight! but, then, we were out on a camp of exercise last cold weather, and I've been on leave a good bit of the hot weather and rains, shooting. So after all I haven't had over much time in Sika, when you come to think of it."

There was no response.

"All that business down by the river rather makes me wonder if the old ladies at home who give so much money to missions, and pity the heathen so desperately, wouldn't do better to turn their attention to the nearest East—the East End of London?"

Still no answer.

"Talking of missions—I wonder who the fellow

was I saw preaching in the bazaar? An Englishman I mean, with a face like an apostle on a stained-glass window, and peculiar light eyes? Do you know him?"

Stapely turned round in weary resignation.

"Oh! that would be Wray, the missionary—Oliver Wray. My wife says he is mad."

"Why?"

"Perhaps because he has given up all that most people think makes life worth living,—for the sake of your old ladies' heathen."

Again that exasperating lack of any clue to the Judge's own opinions! Devasse could endure it no longer; rational conversation with a fellow like Stapely was impossible.

"My pony wants a sprint after his long wait in the bazaar," he said abruptly; and with a farewell wave of his hand, which was not returned, he dashed off along the roadside raising a cloud of dust. He found satisfaction in hoping that the dust would at least give his late disagreeable companion "something to swear about."

Stapely pulled up and waited in sullen wrath till the volume of yellow grit had partially subsided, and the cause of it was a speck in the distance. Then he continued on his way and endeavoured to re-concentrate his mind. But it was useless; the chain of ideas was unlinked, the control of thought gone, and he rode back, resentful, to his bungalow. This was a massive building, with high rooms that echoed,

and an ugly, though well-kept compound. Plants in pots fringed the front veranda; on the stone floor lay brightly dyed mats; comfortable chairs and convenient tables were grouped about. The master dismounted in the grey light that so soon becomes darkness in India, and walked up the steps with moody deliberation. The shrill sound of a child's voice came from a room to his right; he pushed open a door noiselessly and looked inside.

A little boy of about seven years old, clad in a pink flannel night-suit, was capering to and fro, eluding an old ayah who followed him on her knees, holding out spoonfuls of the supper he declined to eat. The child was like a hobgoblin with his lanky limbs, luminous eyes, and wisps of pale hair above a bulging forehead. The big nursery was dimly lit, the little iron bed looked ridiculous alone in the centre of the vast room, save for the huddle of quilt and blanket alongside it where Buria, the ayah, slept and snored in the night time.

"See, see, Babba! the jackals outside shall have it," she threatened. "*They* know what will make them big and brave." She waved the spoon towards the outer door, and cried: "Come, jackal people, come, come!"

From behind the curtain that hid the door through which he watched, Stapely saw his little son dart forward with open mouth and swallow the spoonful, half-convinced that he had thereby sorely disappointed "the jackal people." But the

child refused the next helping, declaring shrilly that the jackals were welcome to it, and finally struck the bowl of bread and milk from the ayah's hand in peevish rebellion.

"Aree! narty-narty," remonstrated Buria, shocked but helpless.

Stapely dropped the curtain and moved away. He was in no humour for a moral tussle with the insurgent. Over a whiskey-and-soda in the dining room he made half-hearted resolves to send the child home. Babba ought to go home and at once, but financially it would be very inconvenient. The child and his mother had just come back from a five months' stay in the hills, and the double establishment had been very expensive—indeed, Mrs. Stapely had returned earlier than was usual on that account. The two elder boys, twins of fifteen, cost a lot of money at a leading public school; he was obliged to allow his sister, a widow, two hundred a year; living in India was growing more expensive, while the scale of official pay remained unaltered; and socially a good deal was expected of the senior civilians of a district. Then, apart from the money question, Edith, his wife, would certainly obstruct the plan. Babba was the youngest, her heart's idol; once in England he must be left there, parted from her as the others had been. Whenever he talked of sending Babba home, she ignored the disadvantage to the boy of keeping him too long in the country, and said it was quite impossible to let him go with

any one but herself; also it was equally impossible that she could go without Griffith. She loathed England, and would not go there without her husband. Babba was thriving, she would take him to the hills again for the hot weather; he would do very well till they could all go home together on furlough.

Furlough, Stapely did not want to take just yet; he had not been long in the Sika district, and there was his book—how could he possibly work at that if on leave in England? In another year it would be finished; well perhaps, after all, it would not do Babba much harm to stay out an extra year, but he wished that Edith would consent to go on ahead with the child in the spring. She was tiresomely helpless and prejudiced where England was concerned. He checked his sudden impatience and felt ashamed of it. Edith was such a good wife in her own way; what matter if her education had been slight, if she were interested in little beyond local matters and her own and her neighbours' immediate concerns?—cared only to talk about bazaar prices, other women's housekeeping and methods of entertaining, and petty happenings in the station? He reminded himself that she had lived in India since she was fifteen, when her father, a colonel of native infantry, having a string of boys to start in professions, brought her out to India because he could not afford to keep her at home; and "a girl's educa-

tion didn't matter." Was it any wonder that she felt out of her element in England, did not enjoy going home on furlough, and rejoiced to return to the life she really appreciated and understood?

Edith had been a bright, healthy girl of nineteen when Griffith Stapely met her at a hill station while on his first privilege leave. He, too, was young, fond of tennis, riding, dancing; there were picnics, balls, tennis parties; and perhaps her mother, who knew the full value of a promising civilian youth, manœuvred to throw them together. But at least the young man was fortunate in securing a wife who could speak the language, was an excellent manager, thoroughly understood the details of housekeeping that spell hourly comfort in India, and was neither fast nor delicate. Intellectually he soon left her far behind. The lore and literature, ethnology and sociology of the people laid hold upon his mind, and after sixteen years of marriage he had become silent, abstracted, older than his years, thinking, writing, reading in mental isolation; while Edith had remained comparatively stationary in mind and body—wiry, energetic, an indefatigable manager, kind hearted, good-tempered, unimaginative—a typical "memsahib."

When the sound of wheels and a high voice outside told Stanley that his wife had returned from tennis at the station club, he went out quickly to meet her. He was not sorry this time to have his thoughts interrupted.

"Now listen," she was saying with severity to the groom, who looked abashed and guilty, "you will weigh the grain in front of me in the veranda to-morrow morning and every morning until I give a different order. That pony is far too thin. There is villainy in the stable!"

She turned to enter the house, alert and active, her trim figure clad in tennis costume, brown hair fluffing beneath a straw sailor hat, and quick hazel eyes that held a vigilance born of long familiarity with the wily habits of native servants. "Oh! Griff—so you're back? I'm sorry I'm so late, but it couldn't be helped. Just let me run and see if Babba is all right and then I'll tell you what delayed me."

She flung her racquet on the table with a clatter, and padded off along the veranda in her heelless tennis shoes.

Her husband waited idly for a few minutes after she had disappeared, then went to his dressing-room where, presently, she joined him as he was changing into evening clothes.

"I ought to change, too, at once," she said, "or I shan't have time to make the salad, but I must just tell you what has happened. It is most interesting. Sophia Williams was at tennis to-day——"

"What is there interesting in that, except that I thought missionaries were supposed to keep clear of wordly amusements!"

"Oh! Griff—she plays so seldom, poor thing,

and so badly, and it's such a pleasure to her. Anyway she was there to-day and I drove her home. Fancy! she was going to walk, quite cheerfully, all through the dust from the Club to the Mission House, because her father is out in the district, itinerating, and has got their trap with him. I couldn't let her go such a distance on foot, could I?—all through the bazaar, too, though I was late as it was, and I hate not being here when Babba goes to bed, and Buria says he was so naughty to-night, just because I wasn't there! As we were driving along, Miss Williams told me such a piece of news——"

She paused to whet his curiosity, but he only grunted. He cared nothing, and knew little, about the Williams family except that the missionary and his wife, and the missionary's daughter by a former marriage, were an ardent trio who worked very hard at their native schools and orphanages, their meetings and services and efforts at conversion—with what result he had not troubled to investigate. Idolatry at Sika certainly would not appear to be lessening in spite of missionary exertion.

"It'll be dinner time in a minute and you won't be ready," said Stapely, rather with impatience.

"Well, you're dressed. Come in with me while I change. I must finish telling you."

She led the way into the next room—a typical Indian bedroom of the plains. Two beds without head or foot rails, enormous wardrobes of teakwood, a blue and white drugget on the floor, a dressing

table without drapery so that no reptile might lurk beneath, boxes ranged against the wall raised on bricks out of reach of the white ants. Stapely sat down on a wicker chair to listen with resignation to the recital of the Williams news, though whatever it was it would interest him not at all. Moreover, he had just remembered a book that might be of valuable assistance to him in the difficult chapter of his own work, and he wanted to look it up in a catalogue. His wife changed rapidly into a tea gown, moving to and fro, talking all the time.

"Mrs. Williams got a letter by the English mail this morning from her daughter! I never knew before to-day that Mrs. Williams had been married twice! Of course I knew *Mr.* Williams had, because there's Sophia. Mrs. Williams, it appears, was the daughter of an old retired missionary up at Landour, and she married a man in a cavalry regiment who was at the depôt. Wasn't it weird—a missionary's daughter to marry like that? But she must have been very pretty, sometimes she looks almost pretty now in a gentle, old-fashioned way, in spite of her grey hair and faded face! Sophia Williams told me the whole story—the man's name was Crivener, Captain Crivener, and he took his wife home, and just before the baby was born, he died. It seems that Mrs. Williams, Mrs. Crivener as she was then of course, came back to India when the child was a few months old, and left the little thing with its grandmother, Lady Crivener—I couldn't quite make out why, Sophia didn't seem to

know exactly, but it seems to have been a complete separation. Anyhow the grandmother died last year and left the girl with hardly any money, and she's not happy with her uncle and aunt. For the last two or three months she has been corresponding with her mother, and now she has written to ask if she may come out here! Fancy!—after all these years! Did you ever hear such a thing, Griff?"

"Yes—no," said her husband absently.

"I don't believe you've heard a word I've been saying!" said Mrs. Stapely, much aggrieved, "and it is all *so* interesting. What on earth will a girl like that do among missionaries!"

"She may be very happy with them. After all they are her own relations."

"Yes, but practically she has never even seen her mother, and think of the way she must have been brought up. Sophia Williams says she believes the Criveners were quite grand people, though her mother has always been very reticent about them. Miss Crivener lived in London with her grandmother, and I expect knew lots of people and went out a great deal. I should imagine she would *hate* living with the Williamses!"

"And what about the Williams' point of view? What will they do with a young woman of rank and fashion upsetting all their ways and turning their house inside out? In any case I don't see what business it is of yours, or why you need bother your head about it!"

"She ought to marry out here," said Mrs.

Stapely, ignoring the last remark. "I will see what I can do for her; she would have no sort of chance down at the Mission House, never meeting a soul."

"There's Wray—he's a bachelor," said Stapely indifferently. Then he got up and shouted "Dinner" through the doorway.

"Oh! Wray!" was the contemptuous answer. "You don't suppose a mad creature like that would think of anything so worldly as matrimony! and what woman would look at him now he's given all his money over to the mission and left himself nothing to marry on? No—we must ask her up here as often as possible and give her a good time, if she's a nice girl. There are four bachelors in the English regiment."

"Then it's to be hoped for her own sake that she won't fall to the lot of the young fool I met this afternoon. What's his name?——Devasse, I believe. D——d ass would be more appropriate."

"Captain Devasse? But, Griff, he's perfectly delightful, and so handsome. Why don't you like him?"

Stapely made no answer. He had no valid reason for his dislike of Captain Devasse; and as they went in to dinner he confessed to himself, with innate honesty, that he would have disliked anybody who had happened to intrude on him during his ride that afternoon.

"That's just like you," complained his wife, "you take dislikes for no reason whatever; and as it

happens," triumphantly, "Captain Devasse is the most eligible of the whole four, and would be a splendid match for any girl. I heard the other day that in the last few months he has come into a lot of money quite unexpectedly. They all thought in the regiment that he would retire, but he loves soldiering, and means to stick to it, and to the regiment, and they are delighted. He is such a favourite with them all. *Everybody* likes him but you, Griff!"

CHAPTER IV

LATE that night, in the sitting-room of the Mission bungalow, Mrs. Williams, the missionary's wife, awaited the return of her husband from a short preaching tour among the outlying villages of the district. Around her were whitewashed, undecorated walls, and furniture of the plainest. Half a dozen framed photographs, mostly groups of mission workers and their pupils, stood on the mantelpiece; mission literature, periodicals, pamphlets, tracts, lay neatly piled on the tables, and a certain homely sense of comfort pervaded the room in spite of its bareness. Within the bungalow all was quiet. Mrs. Williams' step-daughter, Sophia, wearied with her games of tennis, had gone to bed; the servants were in their quarters outside, and the monotonous murmur of their voices, with the hum of the native city, came muffled through the heavy night mist that rose from the river and pressed against the window panes.

As Mrs. Stapely had remarked to her husband that same evening, Mrs. Williams must have been an exceedingly pretty girl. Though faded now before her time, though her hair, flattened on either side of her forehead, was grey and scanty, though

she had lost, and not replaced, a front tooth, and wore clumsy spectacles, it was still evident that once her calm brown eyes had been brilliant, her skin of a satin texture, her mouth almost perfect in shape. Nose and chin were still clear-cut and delicate; the whole outline of head and face, regular and immobile, recalled the mid-Victorian type, and she looked as though she should have been arrayed in black silk, and a shawl fastened with a cameo brooch, a crinoline, and chenille hair net.

Year after year of conscientious fulfilment of duty in a trying climate, of teaching native children, training native girls, expostulating with native women, economising on a moderate income, battling with inferior servants had withered her body and planed her mind to the straight level of a narrow board. Her health was even, though not robust, an occasional holiday to the hills with her husband and step-daughter seemed to make little difference to her, either for benefit or the reverse. She never appeared elated, neither were her spirits ever very palpably depressed.

Now, on a chair beside her, a pile of needlework in various stages of completion awaited her inspection—the sewing of her class of native Christian girls. But it lay there neglected, for her hands grasped a letter in her lap, her eyes gazed dreamily through her spectacles at nothing tangible. Mission matters were far from her mind, which had soared back through the wide space of more than

twenty-four years. The vision was before her of her first husband as she had seen him, so long, long ago, that early morning on the hill pathway. She remembered—the rains being just over—how crystal clear had been the atmosphere, how golden the sunshine, how wondrous blue the sky!—and the dahlias had looked so pretty all down the hillside. She was picking a cluster of them, white, pink, crimson, yellow, purple, when a man had galloped round the corner on a grey pony and nearly knocked her over. How concerned he was, and how tall and strong and splendid she thought him as he bent over her cowering, shy and frightened, against the bank. Ah! the meetings that followed—the meetings in the crisp, early mornings; in the sunny mid-days; in the moonlit evenings!

A sob shook the woman's thin frame; she started at the sound as though it had come from another part of the room, then raised the letter from her lap and held it to her mouth as though to still the throb of memory and press back the tears—the letter that was from his child, the little baby girl she had left in England, who now, poor and unhappy, had turned to her mother. It was not the first letter that had come to Mrs. Williams from her daughter. Three months ago the girl had written warmly, introducing herself with graceful diffidence; had hinted that hers was not the blame for the silence she was now breaking; had begged for tidings, and hoped she was not utterly forgotten. The answer Mrs. Willians sent was shown to no one at the Mission

House; but in due time there came another letter from her daughter; and now a third and last, the one that she held in her hand, contained a request that, if granted, must bring a great change into the quiet household.

There came a sudden noise in the veranda and she dropped the letter back into her lap, turning to the pile of materials beside her, almost like a guilty child caught neglecting its task. But her hands trembled, she could not see quite clearly, she found it difficult to manage her voice that she might greet her husband as he came in, weary, dusty, dishevelled after the long day's journeying over rough country.

Mr. Williams was dressed in a clerical suit of sensible dust colour; he wore thick boots and carried a large sun-hat in his hand. In the uncertain light he might have passed for a man of little over fifty with his sturdy, thickset figure, plentiful iron-grey hair, and full, short beard. In reality, he was sixty-seven; but a vigorous constitution, a natural complacence of temperament, and a singleness of purpose, in itself a safeguard against nervous irritation, had so far preserved him well.

"Oh! my dear—why did you wait up for me?" His voice had a slight burr, as though his early youth might have been passed in the north of England. "Suppose I had not arrived for another two hours!" He gave her a loud kiss, inquired after her health and that of Sophia, and dusted his coat and beard with his handkerchief. "I think I may

truthfully say I have had a more successful itineration this time than ever before. You will be interested to hear about it. I met with wonderfully little opposition, and among the former converts I found only two cases of backsliding. That is the advantage of keeping in constant touch with the same villages and going over the same ground as often as possible. I believe in concentrated, far more than in widespread, visiting, as I am sure you have often heard me say before. *Quality,* not quantity!"

He smiled at her with deep-set kindly eyes. There was a simple strength, a natural confidence and assurance in the man's personality, giving the impression that hesitation or perplexity was unknown to him—that, for him, there was only one way, the one that his conscience told him was the right way.

"You are too sleepy to hear about it to-night, I see," he said lightly, as she did not answer. "Are you also too sleepy to give me something to eat? I've only had a chupatti and a drink of buffalo's milk in a village since morning."

At once Mrs. Williams was full of self-reproach. In the past two hours, since Sophia had gone to bed and left her undisturbed, the duties and details of everyday life had receded from her as though unreal and intangible, while her memories had materialised. She had entirely forgotten that John would be in need of food on his return from his travels, and she had given no orders to the servants.

"Oh! anything will do," said John good-tempered, though secretly surprised, "some bread and butter and a cup of tea—I don't care what it is."

And indeed he did not. He ate merely to keep himself alive and well, and his daughter had been known to assert that if you took away Father's helping of meat when he was not looking and substituted pudding, he would continue to eat without observing the difference.

With the magic that seems to pertain to Indian kitchens, tea and poached eggs and toast were soon on the table; and while John Williams refreshed himself his wife made an effort to account for the reason of her neglect.

"I have been so agitated, John," she said, in a tone of apology, "that I'm afraid I forgot everything but what was in this letter." She laid the envelope on the table and kept her hand over it, jealously. "I—I hope it will not upset and annoy you."

He looked at her quickly. She was sitting opposite to him, faded and gentle as usual, but in her voice was a note of excitement and apprehension that was new to him.

"Well, my dear, what is it?" He poured a large quantity of milk into his tea, and pushed the teapot towards her. "Take a cup yourself, Mary, you are evidently disturbed, it will calm you."

"It is something so very unexpected," she faltered, and paused as though gathering courage

for the announcement. "John, my daughter, Anne Crivener, wants to come out to us——"

There was silence. Throughout her married life with John she had known, instinctively, that deep down in her husband's heart was to be found one spot of weakness—jealousy of her first marriage.

She knew he had fought it, that he imagined he had conquered it in those early days when, sore with grief and loneliness and having no faith in her own judgment, she had married him more as a refuge from her sorrows than from affection—love in a romantic sense she had none to give. With John the circumstances had been reversed; his first marriage was one of expediency and lukewarm though dutiful regard. His second, one of almost passionate love. Before her marriage with Philip Crivener he had loved Mary and asked her to be his wife; and when she came back, broken and weak and embittered, he had held out strong arms to shelter her, had offered again his honest love and friendship, and such consolation as he could give her. So, for his sake, she had repressed her memories; always had she been on her guard not to wound him by look, or word, or sigh; never had she willingly betrayed the ache that dulled her breast, that beat through her thoughts by day and her dreams by night. It was for John's sake that she had never written for news of Anne, and when, prompted by his stern sense of duty, he had asked her if she felt

it right to renounce the child so completely, she had answered calmly that she felt it was best, gaining renewed strength from the unconscious relief in his eyes.

At first, she knew, he had watched with anxious dread for signs of regret and the wince of remembrance; but gradually, as the busy, arduous life, in which there was scarcely time for looking back, wore away the sharpness of her desolation, his own apprehensions calmed; he came to believe that Mary had forgotten, and he put the past out of sight as thoroughly as he trusted she had done also. The unexpected resurrection of the past as constituted in Anne's first letter had confronted him like an ugly picture suddenly turned to the light after hanging for years with its face to the wall, and had caused him a good deal of disquietude. Now he felt bewildered, even helpless, for a moment; and then a fierce resentment shot through his being like a tongue of flame. It passed; and once more he took supreme control of himself.

"It is very unexpected, certainly," he said quietly, "no wonder you feel agitated, my dear. Why does she want to come out? Has she any idea of doing mission work?" He made no request to see the letter.

"No, not as a worker, I think," said Anne's mother rather incoherently. "Will you read what she says?"

"I would rather you told me—I have not got my

spectacles." Mr. Williams knew that his glasses were in his coat pocket, where he always kept them when not in use, but at the moment he was entirely unconscious of telling an untruth. The trifle betrayed to his wife how deeply he was disturbed.

There was no need for her to read the letter, since she knew the contents by heart. She moved it about a little beneath her hand on the table, as she began to tell him Anne's story. When she paused Mr. Williams stirred his tea and waited without comment for her to continue.

"You know Sir Richard Crivener took her to live with him and his wife, and—and she is not happy. I do not quite know why, she does not go much into detail, but she says she can stop there no longer for many reasons. She asks if she may come to us. Sir Richard has settled a little money on her. She can pay her passage, and something to us for her keep——"

Their eyes met. In his there was decision,—as usual, he intended to do only what was right; in hers was appealing apology.

"What is your feeling about it, Mary?" he asked gently.

The sense of consideration and gratitude towards him that had kept her strong and resolute in the early days of their marriage rose again within her now.

"I feel that I want to do what you think best, John. If you consider that her coming would be

unfair, unnecessary, or inadvisable, I am ready to see with your eyes. We do not know—Anne," she pronounced the name softly, "she may not be at all suited to our life, she may cause trouble and difficulty and prove a trial——"

He waved his broad hand with its short, thick fingers, as though to brush aside her doubts. "My own feeling is," he said firmly, "that we ought to welcome her to what we can give her. She is your child, my dear, she has the right to share our home. I shall not grudge it to her. But if it is against your wishes in any way, Mary, if you feel it would be at all a burden or a distress to you—then I should say in such a case my first duty was towards my wife, and I should refuse without hesitation."

She knew that he was trying not to hope that she might make some personal objection to the intrusion of Anne. To relieve him, to ensure his future peace, to prevent the risk of a disturbing element in the establishment, she had only to conquer her own feelings, as she had done before; but the craving to look upon Philip's child, perhaps to see his eyes once more in hers, perhaps to hear the timbre of his voice, assailed her so violently that for the moment the happiness of John Williams with his faithful heart, his sincerity and sterling worth, seemed of no account. She must have Anne; she must see her, touch her, know that she was hers. Her heart beat like a frightened animal's in quick, tremulous throbs; she crumpled up the letter in her hand.

"John," she said with difficulty, "I should like" —she had nearly said "love"—"to have her—but she asks us to decide at once, to telegraph Yes or No."

Mr. Williams finished his tea noisily. "Of course it is settled, my dear. Of course she shall come and be welcome, if you wish it. I hope we may make her happy. We have room, and one mouth, more or less, to feed, makes little difference. We will wire her to-morrow."

Yet the missionary felt that a trial was approaching that from a human standpoint might be far harder for him to meet than the defalcations of converts, the indifference of the heathen, or any of the numerous difficulties of his onerous calling. He prayed that he might fight and conquer any tendency to weakness, to impatience, to anger, to jealousy; that the coming change might in no way distract his mind or thoughts from his work; and mingled with it all, for the first time, there stung through his soul the sharpness of a doubt. After all, was Wray, his colleague, right when he held so strenuously to the theory that a wife, family, domestic ties, personal interests were not for the emissary of the Gospel?—that the messenger should be untrammelled by earthly considerations, that heart and brain and soul should be free to hold nothing but the Message?

Hurriedly John Williams pushed back his chair. He recognised that he was very tired; he told himself that his sense of mental proportion was a little

unbalanced by the fortnight's incessant work coupled with much bodily exertion and indifferent nourishment. As for the sudden remembrance of Wray's principles, he put it from his mind resolutely. Wray was ardent, enthusiastic, zealous, but he was also unpractical, inclined to mysticism, even a little to morbidity, an ascetic by nature, prone to undervalue the earthly gifts of the Father which were meant as much for His ministers as for the rest of His children. . . .

Mr. Williams did not intend to worry himself about Wray and his convictions now; he meant to go to bed and sleep, that he might be fresh for the next day's work. He yawned wearily. "I must go to bed, Mary. We will talk over Anne's plans and settle everything to-morrow. If I don't sleep I shall be fit for nothing in the morning—and I'm not as young as I was, remember!"

He smiled at her with tenderness, and waited as she busied herself with locking up the sugar and tea, and removing the tea tray to a side table. Then they turned out the lamps, and passed through the long double doors into their bedroom.

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Sophia Williams was, perhaps, the only one of the trio at the Mission House who found genuine and unaffected pleasure in the prospect of Anne Crivener's arrival. Apprehension was mingled with Mrs. Williams' desire to have her daughter with her; Mr. Williams tried not to think about it at all;

but Sophia thought of little else in her leisure time—which was limited, for she was an energetic and useful mission worker. She looked after the Christian families living in the compound, had a special class of her own in the Girls' Orphanage; collected children from the bazaar and showed them Bible pictures, also taught them hymns, songs, and drill. She visited in the various zenanas that were open to English missionary ladies and native Bible teachers, and penetrated into other bazaar houses where she was sometimes tolerated and listened to, sometimes politely told that her presence, being a defilement and entailing an inconvenient amount of subsequent bathing and purification, was not altogether welcome. In addition, Sophia organised sales of work, wrote letters to the missionary papers at home, pleaded, begged, and fought for the Cause, all as naturally as she ate and drank and slept. She had been reared to the life, and throughout her thirty-seven years had felt neither dissatisfaction nor discouragement. She was a missionary much in the same sense as she was an Englishwoman—because she was born so, and had never dreamed of being anything else.

At the same time she was refreshingly brisk and cheerful, and frequently indulged in a little mild slang with the air of one who can prove that it is possible to be natural without being wicked. In the same spirit she played tennis occasionally, or badminton, at the Station Club; when she had time she

read a modern novel; altogether she prided herself on being broadminded and tolerant of harmless amusements. Of her appearance there was not much to be said. It was plain yet pleasant. Straight, pale brown hair, a thick nose, a wide mouth, and serene eyes of indefinite colour; she was short like her father, had inherited his sturdy figure, and habitually dressed in useful grey flannel, with brown canvas shoes that were guiltless of heels.

Everybody liked Sophia Williams. Oliver Wray, her father's junior colleague, liked her very much and always enjoyed talking to her. Perhaps he felt, involuntarily, that her common-sense and practical, if narrow outlook was an antidote to his own rather complex, emotional nature. From Sophia he had heard all about Miss Crivener; and her interest and excitement over the matter had infected even him with a sense of anticipation.

He lingered in the Mission House veranda one morning, the week before Anne was expected to arrive, and heard the latest details. When the morning's work was over he often breakfasted with the Williams family, and he was welcome to dine with them whenever he chose. His own quarters were at one end of the Mission compound—a tiny bungalow of two rooms and a bathroom; and Mrs. Williams encouraged him to take meals with them as frequently as possible, having a strong suspicion that he paid little attention to his commissariat arrangements, and that he often forgot to eat at

all! To-day he was going out into camp, bound for some villages that Mr. Williams had not been able to include in his tour—which, for want of sufficient workers, had been left unavoidably for some considerable time without spritual visitation.

"By the time you are back she will be quite settled with us!" said Sophia. She was occupied in painting Christmas cards to be sold for the benefit of the Mission. Mrs. Williams was feeding the fowls, and Mr. Williams had shut himself in his study to go through mission accounts. "I told you she was to arrive next week, didn't I?"

Sophia had told him the date whenever she saw him, after she had known it herself.

"She is coming by P. & O., I suppose," he remarked.

"Yes. Father thinks it is a pity she has not chosen the British India Line. It is cheaper, and some of our mission people could have escorted her. Mr. and Mrs. Draper would have been only too delighted—they are coming out from furlough by British India, but there was no time to write and catch her before she started. She wired that she was coming out by the next mail but one; and she wrote such a nice letter. I am sure she is charming, and will be the greatest addition to our circle. She will be quite the baby—she is only twenty-four! When I think that I am thirteen years older it makes me feel quite a Methuselah!"

Wray's thoughts had wandered during Sophia's

talk. He was recalling a conversation he had had that morning with a Hindu priest who had told him that, to the Hindu mind, the most remarkable instance of irreverence on the part of the Christians was the fact that they could bind their Holy Book with leather! Even to print a Holy Book is considered to be irreverent; but that the Christian will permit his Scriptures to be contaminated by the skin of a dead animal, is, to the devout Hindu, sufficient proof of the vulgarity of the Western's religion.

Therefore Wray, instead of assuring Miss Williams that she did not look a Methuselah, whatever she might feel, forgot his manners and calmly said "Yes."

She bore him no malice; but glanced at him with a friendly smile. He was leaning against one of the pillars of the veranda, and the severe purity of his face struck a thrill of uneasiness to her kind heart. It was not natural for a man of his age, hardly more than thirty, to look so saintly; she was afraid it argued great delicacy of constitution, and yet, as her eyes moved on from the regular features to the broad shoulders and excellent proportions of the tall lean frame, she knew there was vitality in every line. What he needed was a wife to induce him to take reasonable care of his body, so that he might exercise his spirit without injury to his health. A scheme presented itself to her mind. How about Annie Crivener?—"Annie," Sophia preferred to call her, as being so much prettier, and

more suitable to a young lady. Mr. Wray, it was known, belonged to a family of importance in England, and, therefore, understood the life that Anne was leaving behind her; doubtless, they would have much in common, in a sense the same feelings and ideas. Nothing could be more suitable. Annie would be the ideal helpmate for Mr. Wray, spurring him on to fresh endeavour, yet cherishing his comfort, his material needs; the while she imparted the atmosphere that was their birthright to the home life—the home life that Sophia's father always advocated as being so necessary to the missionary, and, therefore, indirectly to the work of God's Kingdom.

"Do you know what I think?" said Sophia, who, though entirely well meaning was equally tactless. "I think that you couldn't do better than marry Annie Crivener!"

She held up the card she had just finished, and contemplated it with admiration. It seemed to the irritated man characteristic of the painter. One of the grandest verses of the New Testament was written in illuminated letters across the bottom of the card, and above was a foolish little bird perched on a twig, with blue wings and a yellow breast, its beak wide open in song. A combination of the great and the trivial, which tried Wray's patience sorely for the moment, till his sense of humour counteracted his exasperation.

"Did you hear what I said?" inquired Sophia

ceasing her scrutiny of the card, and fixing him with her eyes.

"Oh! yes," he said indifferently, "but I do not think we need discuss the subject." He said as little as politeness would allow.

"Oh! of course I know you think you are never going to marry, but suppose," she added in playful warning, "you were to fall in love!"

He looked at his watch. "Good gracious!" he said with a start, "I'm frightfully late. I had no idea it was so late. I must be off if I want to do my first march and any visiting before nightfall. Good-bye Miss Williams," he shook hands hurriedly, "say good-bye to Mrs. Williams for me, will you? —and explain? Please thank her for the provisions she so kindly sent over for me to take with me. Good-bye."

He ran down the steps and passed rapidly across the compound. Sophia began to paint another bird with undisturbed complacence.

CHAPTER V

ANNE CRIVENER saw her step-father for the first time on the platform of the Sika railway station late at night. The coarse yellow lamplight flared down on the pushing, yelling crowd of native passengers arriving and departing; and Anne, who, during the journey up country, had become fairly familiar with the pandemonium that ensued directly the train stopped at a station, stood and watched the struggling stream with interest. She was half deafened by the long-drawn nasal cries of water-carriers and sweetmeat sellers, and the apparently reasonless clamour of the travellers; she was half suffocated by the indescribable smell of spicy food and rancid oil, camphor, garlic, tobacco, sandalwood; and for the moment, in gazing at the astonishing medley of brown humanity, she forgot her step-father, and the fact that he was to meet her. It was not until she was mobbed by a pack of vociferous coolies, who fought to drag her belongings from the carriage, that she looked anxiously around, expecting to see a gentle old clergyman in clerical garb, soft black hat, and, of course, with a long white beard, edging his way humbly through the seething mass of people. But the vigorous, though elderly man who thrust himself through the crowd with unmission-

ary-like determination, wore a melon-shaped sun hat (why, in the middle of the night? thought Anne), and on raising it, disclosed a firm, blunt face, and a short thick beard that was more brown than grey.

To hear and be heard in such a din was impossible, and they shook hands with wordless greeting, Anne smiling in amused despair. The missionary scrutinised her swiftly as she counted her luggage, and his mind misgave him, just as he had always known it would misgive him when he should see his step-daughter. The very veil of gauze tied deftly round her hat, the dust cloak falling in graceful lines from her shoulders, the soft doe-skin gloves on her hands—every detail of her attire, entirely correct for travelling and, at the same time, the most becoming, stamped her as belonging to quite another sphere than that inhabited by the Williams family. The good John felt rather as if he were escorting royalty along the platform; an involuntary sense of deference was upon him, and he disliked the sensation exceedingly. He could have wished that the girl would betray a hint of superiority in her manner, or treat him with even a suspicion of indifference, that he might cherish a real grievance against her. But, settled with him in the stuffy hired vehicle that was to take them, with her luggage, to the Mission House, she was charmingly deferential, and conveyed tactfully an impression of indebtedness, combined with the confidence of re-

lationship, without actually voicing her gratitude or calling him her benefactor—which he rather dreaded she might do.

They rattled along in the dilapidated conveyance. Darkness prevented Anne from seeing her surroundings, but she caught dim visions of huge tree-trunks; of figures muffled in white, passing along like silent ghosts; now and then a jingling ekka or creaking cart packed with huddled forms; presently windowless hovels, with open doorways and feeble lights glimmering within. These dwellings increased in size and number, and then, suddenly, the gharry swung round a corner into a blaze of light and a roar of sound—the bazaar, as Mr. Williams told his companion. Flames from primitive oil-lamps streamed in the night draught: the street was very narrow, the crowd dense and ever moving—a jumble of dark faces with white teeth and eyeballs beneath turbans of every shape and colour. Anne felt bewildered by the glare, the noise, the smell, the chaos, and the succession of countless little shops, like irregular cubicles, gleaming with brass and copper, piled high with baskets of grain and trays of sweetmeats; or else empty save for well-filled shelves in the background, and groups of natives squatting on the floor, smoking hookahs, conversing lazily.

It was a relief to turn into the comparative silence of the Mission compound, and to stop under a wide, pillared porch. Mr. Williams led the way up the

veranda steps, a native servant pushed open long, double doors; and Anne saw, waiting in the middle of a high, whitewashed room, a woman with bony shoulders and a knitted shawl, a shrunken figure, thin grey hair, and spectacles. Involuntarily the girl glanced at her step-father, and knew, by his face, that the woman was her mother.

Mrs. Williams moved forward with nervous eagerness to greet her child—Philip's child! Anne, tall and slim, bent with graceful tenderness and received her mother's embrace. There were kisses—disjointed sentences—and Mr. Williams turned away. As he called to the servants to bring refreshments he wondered, vaguely, why, if this girl was so rejoiced to be with her mother, she had never written, never given a sign, during all those years, that the thought of her mother lay in her heart? Then his natural sense of justice sought, and remembered, a reason for her conduct—her father's family had been averse to any communication, and, of course, she had felt bound to respect their wishes until she considered herself in a position to act as her inclination guided her.

He turned, and looked at her again. She was sitting now on a severe little bamboo couch, holding her mother's hand; and he recognised with annoyance that she made the homely room appear dismally commonplace. It was as if a rare piece of Sèvres china had been placed on the kitchen dresser with the everyday cups and saucers; and the com-

parison became still more unfortunately pronounced when Sophia entered the room! Sophia had put on a thin white silk blouse for the occasion, and her stays showed through it; her fawn-coloured skirt was too short in front and clung about her heels at the back, and, in her excitement, she had forgotten to put on a waistband: wisps of pale hair stuck out behind her ears and straggled down the nape of her neck.

She was in a flutter of cordial welcome, fussily solicitous to know if dear "Annie" was tired; almost tragically anxious that she should be happy and "at home" with them in the Mission House. Annie must promise to ask for anything and everything she wanted; she must never hesitate to speak —to find fault; she must do just exactly as she liked, etc. Anne had yet to discover that poor, kind Sophia was always ready to make everybody comfortable except herself, and as often as not only succeeded in pleasing herself at the price of everybody's comfort.

"You must have some refreshment at once," cried Sophia. "Father—tell them to bring it."

"Oh! please," begged Anne, "don't bother about anything for me at this time of night. I had dinner somewhere on the way. I forget the name of the place, if ever I knew it! Really I don't want anything. Just a glass of wine, perhaps, and a biscuit, and then I will go to bed. I found I could not sleep in the train," turning to her mother, "so I am

rather tired." She smiled intimately, and patted the trembling hand that still lay in her own.

Then she became aware that Sophia was appealing with distressed eyes to Mr. Williams, who said simply: "We keep no wine, or intoxicants of any sort in the house, but there is milk in plenty; is there not, Mary, my dear?"

Anne admired her stepfather's entire lack of embarrassment, and could have shaken Sophia for her unconcealed concern.

"I would rather have milk than anything else!" declared Anne—who felt she would almost have protested that she infinitely preferred ditch-water if necessary.

Sophia was comforted. "I will bring the tray to your room," she volunteered eagerly; "of course you must be worn out, and we ought not to keep you talking here. Come, I will show you your room."

Mrs. Williams began to say something, but checked the words and quietly kissed Anne good-night. At one time she had dreamed of taking Anne to the bedroom she had meant to prepare for her child with her own hands. Remembering the rooms at Crivener, she had thought to enamel the bedstead and the common deal dressing-table white, to arrange a convenient writing-table, perhaps to buy a little sofa; but there had been no money for superfluities, and Sophia had long ago appropriated, as a matter of course, the task of adorning Anne's

room. With her natural reticence, Mrs. Williams had yielded silently. Had she said, at the outset, that it would give her pleasure to prepare Anne's chamber, Sophia would have been the last person to thwart her; but Mrs. Williams had not spoken, and Sophia was not one of those people who understand by intuition. Therefore she had gone to work with cheerful interest; and the result was certainly remarkable! Now she pushed open the double doors with her foot and the edge of the tray. On the tray was a tumbler of milk and a plate of mixed biscuits; Sophia was very fond of mixed biscuits herself, particularly the variety with currants in them, and never doubted but that they would be an equal treat to Anne.

The tray she deposited on the bed, and then turned up the oil-lamp that hung against the wall. The room was long and narrow, and a bathroom opened from it at one end. Anne immediately observed that the lamp was far from the dressing-table, instead of beside it; also that the looking-glass *faced* the window! Then she noticed that illuminated texts, mats, bags, little boxes, "tidies," seemed to be everywhere. The texts were nailed along the wall at about the height of a dado; the dressing-table resembled a stall at a church bazaar, for, upon the thick red and white toilet cover, were placed brown Holland receptacles, bound with scarlet braid, having "Brushes," "Comb," "Combings," "Odds and Ends," "Tape," etc., worked

across them in scarlet thread. Small bags of silk, velvet, or patchwork, dangled from the looking-glass; brackets constructed from the lids of cardboard boxes, strung together with coloured cord and covered with odd scraps of cretonne, were suspended from the wall within easy reach; boxes disguised in the same ingenious manner had "Gloves," "Handkerchiefs," "Veils," even "Stockings," embroidered on their coverings, and each box rested on its own fancy-work mat.

"I made all these things myself," said Sophia, with humble pleasure in her own achievements. Anne expressed appropriate admiration, and Sophia crimsoned with delight. "I am working another set of mats now, in my spare time, for a sale. Blue forget-me-nots on cream crash! It is so effective." She moved the tray to a chair and felt the bedclothes. "I wonder if you will have enough over you? It is cold at night here at this time of year —but you will find it too hot, I am afraid, later on!" She sighed wistfully, and added: "Oh, I do hope you will be comfortable and happy with us, but I know how very different it must be!"

"You are all so kind," murmured Anne, trying not to sound bored. "Of course, I shall be quite happy and comfortable."

When Sophia had left the room reluctantly, after kissing her, as a child kisses, with pursed lips and a loud smack, Anne sat down on a clumsy cane chair and drew a long breath—then glanced, apprehen-

sively, at the door, fearing to hear a timid knock and to see Mrs. Williams venture inside. Anne, versed in the symptoms of human nature, had divined the mother's longing to be alone with her daughter, had been almost clairvoyantly alive to the poor lady's nervousness, the trembling excitement, the throbbing of pent-up emotion, so long repressed, that, revived again by Anne's coming, was now, so to speak, in its second childhood.

But no sound of movement in the house reached her, and Anne sat, feeling wide awake, rendered restless by the crude smell of fresh whitewash and new matting, the ceaseless hum of the bazaar beyond the compound, and—by her own thoughts.

Here she was! The first move had been accomplished in a scheme that she intended to carry through to a finish without unnecessary delay. She saw no reason to remain with these people longer than she was obliged—with her faded, silent, enduring mother, the stumpy old missionary, and his dowdy spinster daughter—in this depressing house, bare, ugly, whitewashed. But meantime she was prepared to accept all drawbacks in a cheerful spirit.

She had determined to make use of her relations in India for her own purpose ever since that day in June when, at tea on the lawn at Crivener, a casual young man guest had mentioned, with details that left no doubt as to the truth of the statement, that Dion Devasse had inherited a fortune quite unexpectedly.

Life at Crivener had proved more difficult even than Anne had anticipated, in spite of tact, diplomacy, and forbearance.. Agnes was impossible. No eligible suitor of Anne's world had presented himself; and she had refused, inflexibly, a nephew of her aunt's who made drain-pipes and a huge income. But when she knew that Dion Devasse, with his good birth, his generous temperament and fine appearance, had gained just that which, as a husband, would render him entirely acceptable, she had formed her plans unhesitatingly with care and deliberation. At first she had contemplated writing to Dion to say that she had decided to come out to Sika to her people. But then, she reflected, never having mentioned her mother or the Williamses to him before, it would be difficult to explain matters on paper. Also, to appear suddenly and without warning, would seem far more spontaneous and less suspicious.

Part of the conversation under the trees on the lawn at Crivener came back to her now with insistent clearness. She smelt the scent of the lime trees, heard the rustle of leaves and the murmur of bees, saw the plain, freckled countenance of the youth opposite her, animated with his news.

"Fancy, what luck for that cousin of mine, Dion Devasse! *You* knew him, Miss Crivener. People have died and things have happened and he's come into a lot of property—valuable building land near London. That sort of thing. No responsibility

about tenants, or tiresome obligations, which leave a man poorer than he was before—don't you know! His mother is nearly crazy with delight and, of course, it will make a difference to her, too; Dion is such a good son. I saw her in town the other day. The only thing that worries her is that he won't come home. Says he means to stick to India for the present, at any rate; that it's a fine country for sport and soldiering, and he's taking his profession seriously. So there he is, grubbing along in a line regiment and nobody the better for all that money but his mother and an old maid sister! How badly Providence does arrange these things! Now if I——"

Anne, too, had felt exasperated with Providence for not arranging Dion's affairs more opportunely in so far as they affected herself. Had Dion only come into his fortune a year earlier she could have accepted him, there would have been no need for all this manœuvring and trouble, there would have been no necessity to make catspaws of her relations, she would never have been obliged to come to India—a hateful country, to judge, so far, by her impressions. . . .

She slept badly that night, and was not at all sorry when daylight brought various sounds about the house. Evidently the Williamses were very early risers; Mr. Williams' voice could be heard issuing orders in Hindustani, and then Sophia's high, pleasant tones echoed through the bungalow in the same



language. Footsteps pattered busily to and fro, and at last the door of Anne's bedroom was bumped open and a young native woman entered backwards, having no hand to spare to push aside the curtain. The tray she held had on it a plate of toast in thick slices and a large cup of tea, to which milk had been added generously, while two lumps of sugar were melting in the overflow that slopped about in the saucer. The young woman grinned, set the tray down on a chair by the bedside, and salaamed.

"I Kristarn!" she announced proudly. "Good-marnin. Name Tabit'a."

"Good-morning, Tabitha," returned Anne, with grave politeness.

"Miss-sahib have bart?" She pointed to the bathroom door.

Anne looked at her watch. Heavens!—it was only seven o'clock. If she got up now, what should she do with herself throughout the long day before her? However, it was but fair to conform to the hours of a household. Granny had always impressed that upon her, with the addition: "If you do not like the hours, the remedy is in your own hands; you can be sent for urgently, and never go there again." On this occasion, unfortunately, the remedy was not in Anne's own hands. She recognised the fact, with a certain ruefulness, as she nodded assent to Tabitha's enquiry.

While the "bart" was in preparation, Sophia demanded admittance, and entered carrying an arm-

ful of books. A muslin-covered pith hat with a wide, straight brim was on her head.

"I'm just off to the elementary school," she announced. "Have you got everything you require?" Sophia always said require instead of want, and commence instead of begin. "Was your chota-hazri all right?—that means little breakfast, you know. The big breakfast is at twelve o'clock, and we are always very ready for it, I can tell you, after the long morning's work. You will have a nice quiet time to unpack your boxes."

She glanced with happy anticipation at the neat cane trunks that stood in a row against the wall. Sophia longed to see her step-sister's clothes, all fresh from England, in the latest fashion, so pretty, so dainty, so new! It would give her genuine and unenvious satisfaction to behold the contents of those boxes. Anne's belongings were a matter for wonder and admiration, not for jealousy or disapproval; and she gazed now at the ribbons and lace and cambric of the other's night-dress, with much the same feeling of pleasure as she would have felt at the sight of an elaborately decorated text, or a particularly ornate design for a boot-bag.

"Mrs. Stapely, the Judge's wife, has a garden party this afternoon—she has asked all the Station—would you like to go?" inquired Sophia. She yearned to display her wonderful relation to the public, and feared secretly that Anne might despise the only gaiety she had it in her power to offer.

"All the Station?" repeated Anne, with sudden interest. "What does that mean? Remember, Sophia dear, I am quite ignorant as to the ways of Indian society."

"Well, I suppose, after London, and all that, you might not call it Society," was the humble answer; "but there will be the civilian people, the magistrate and his wife if they are not in camp, and the police officer and his sister ditto, and the man in the roads and buildings, and the engineer to the municipality, and the doctor, and Mrs. and Miss, and several others. Most likely the officers of the English and native regiments will be there; and perhaps some of our people, though mostly the missionaries have not time, or do not think it right, to mix with the official life of a Station and go to parties. My father says it is a pity to keep apart, that natives respect one more for knowing all the other sahibs and being asked to their houses. Mr. and Mrs. Draper do not agree with him; they say we should not countenance thoughtless gaiety; but, of course, we must all think for ourselves. If it seems wrong to them, of course they should not go —but I can see no harm in moderate amusement if the work does not suffer. I like to be *jolly!*"

"I quite agree with you," said Anne solemnly, "and if you are going to Mrs. Stapely's party, I should like to come too."

She had hardly expected a possibility of meeting Dion so soon!

"Oh! I should never dare to go without you!" cried Sophia merrily. "Mrs. Stapely would never forgive me. She has been longing to see you, and has made up her mind to give you a good time—so that you shall not feel dull with us. We all hope you will make friends among the Station people and go out as much as you like and enjoy yourself. Well," she concluded, with the suspicion of a sigh, "I suppose I must be off. I should love to stay and help you unpack, but the children are waiting for me and father hates me to be unpunctual. Mother has gone already. She is preparing a class of married native women for confirmation, and teaching a lot of girls to sew. Isn't it funny that in India the men should do all the sewing. It seems quite wrong, and we are doing our best to alter things."

Sophia left the room with this last sentence on her lips, in serene confidence that she and Mrs. Williams, together with the rest of the mission ladies throughout India, were about to dissolve a community whose hereditary craft had been bound up with its life and religion for more then twenty centuries.

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Anne dressed leisurely, and unpacked her boxes, setting aside the presents she had brought from England for her relations. She hung her gowns in the large deal wardrobe that would not keep shut—the white satin and the yellow chiffon looked

as if they resented their new quarters and were attempting to get out. There was no space anywhere for hats, and these were forced to remain in their boxes; Anne examined the flowers and feathers anxiously and hoped they would not become irretrievably spoiled. She ventured to move some of the numerous tidies and ornaments that blocked her dressing table, in order to make room for her silver toilet trifles, little boxes, trays, cut-glass bottles, her manicure case, brushes, and hand-glass. Granny's beautiful ivory set was packed and stored in England, together with a few other valuables that Anne had deemed it wiser not to bring to India. Later she dragged the dressing-table into a more favourable light, put out her photographs of Granny and Uncle Richard, as well as those of a few pretty girls and good-looking men; her writing board, and some favourite books. Then she rested and, listening cautiously, lit a cigarette. Almost at once, with the mysterious malice of circumstance, came a gentle tap at the door. In angry resignation Anne flung the cigarette into the bathroom. "I might have known it!" she thought. "Do come in," she cried pleasantly.

Mrs. Williams entered with diffident steps. She had hastened home from her work to see Anne quietly before Sophia should return. Instantly the reflection of ease and egoism that Anne had already cast over the room pierced the poor lady with a stab of remembrance, half bitter, half sweet. It all

breathed to her of Philip, and Philip's world. Involuntarily she remembered how she had admired his dressing case with the silver mounted fittings when they were first married; and the faint redolence of his person, a mingling of tobacco and lavender water, came back to her with a painful rapture. Mr. Williams did not smoke; therefore the delicate whiff of tobacco that stirred her being was, to her belief, but a vivid illusion of memory. With a wistful ache at her heart, she kissed her daughter and made hospitable inquiries. Then, as she glanced about the room, she saw a small black and white box made of porcupine quills lying amongst a heap of miscellaneous objects on the floor. Quickly she stooped and touched it, and Anne saw the thin face convulsed with emotion, and tears trickling beneath the spectacles.

She laid her hand on her mother's arm. "Dear," she said softly, "I've brought that box out for you. It was my father's. Did you give it to him?"

"It—it was my first present to him—with my photograph," was the trembling answer.

"Yes; and I have the very photograph," said Anne. "But I should like to keep that; may I? You take the box, mother, and the little things inside. They ought always to have been yours!"

"I left them—for you," said Mrs. Williams simply. Then her hands fluttered to Anne's shoulders. "Child, do you blame me for leaving you when you

were so little—for running away as I did—for keeping silence all these years?"

"No, no," soothed Anne, kissing her. "I understand. Believe me, I do; and I have never thought of blaming you. If I had, do you think I should have come to you as I have done?"

"Oh! darling—you are so like him!" She put her thin arms about the young, supple figure. "I pray God—I pray God that if ever you love a man as I loved your father you may never know the bitter grief of losing him, the hopeless longing, the despair——"

To Anne's relief, she caught up the box, sobbing, and, hugging it to her as a priceless treasure, almost ran from the room.

For a minute the girl stood motionless, her eyes on the curtain that swayed in front of the door. Then she sighed. "What a brute I am," she said, below her breath; and opened her cigarette case again.

CHAPTER VI

CAPTAIN DEVASSE was no lover of garden parties, but he went to this one of Mrs. Stapely's because his conscience bade him. Originally he had omitted to call until nearly four months after his arrival at Sika. Not that he had neglected her any more than he had neglected the rest of the civilian element in the station, nor was it entirely his fault, seeing that the regiment had been away on a camp of exercise for the greater part of the cold weather. But when he accomplished a visit and she asked him to dinner, he refused—the Stapelys did not interest him—and he had sacrificed none of his purely masculine amusements to attend her "at homes"; finally, in the spring, when she again, with surprising magnanimity, asked him to a dinner party he first accepted and then sent an excuse, because he was granted leave unexpectedly and went off on a long shooting trip to the Hills. Since his return he had called nowhere, except in the regiment. A couple of new polo ponies had claimed their share of his attention; he had arrears of correspondence to get through in connection with his recent inheritance; and work had been heavy, for in addition to his regimental duties he was keenly interested in the men of his company, managed their clubs, took

part in their games, and concerned himself judiciously with their troubles, their pleasures, their doings.

Therefore, when Mrs. Stapely's card arrived bidding him to her entertainment, he felt ashamed of his social negligence, and, though he called her an infernally persistent female, he admitted to himself that his manners had been atrocious, and that, really, she was a generous little sort—much too good, anyway, for that glum, self-satisfied husband of hers. Characteristically, it never occurred to him that he might be considered an acquisition to a party, or that Mrs. Stapely had swallowed her pride on the chance of securing him.

So he arrived at the Judge's house that afternoon, feeling rather bored, in a neat brown suit and a straw hat, when he would much have preferred to be on the polo ground in breeches and boots, or in the racquet court in flannels; he had not the smallest intention, he told himself, of playing pat-ball or badminton with a lot of screaming women. Several girls and young married ladies eyed him with wistful admiration, hoping he might be induced to join in their sets, or frivol with them over lawn-golf and croquet.

But Captain Devasse stood indifferent and unapproachable in the veranda that faced the wide lawn, and talked to Mrs. Stapely's mother, a voluble person who was paying her annual visit to her daughter. Very wisely, she had made a home for herself

in an Indian hill-station on being left a widow, and she expatiated now to Captain Devasse on the advantages of such an unusual proceeding.

"I know I am considered a curiosity," she said to this polite, attentive young soldier, "because I have settled out in India instead of in a London suburb with one servant and a chronic cold, and certainly no pleasure or object in life. Out here my pension gives me a little dwelling in the Hills, to which I can welcome my daughter and my numerous sons and their families. They pay me when they come, certainly, but it is nicer and cheaper and more comfortable for them than a hotel, and, of course, it is delightful for me. In the cold weather I go on a round of visits to my descendants; and I ask you—have I not a much pleasanter time than if I were poked away in a jerry-built villa at Ealing or Norwood or any such detestable place? Then again, I can manage Indian servants, though they are deteriorating every day—whereas I could never fathom the mind of the English domestic. I tried hard, I do assure you, Captain Devasse, but I never kept a cook-general for more than three weeks; we mutually exasperated each other. To hope to understand them you must be born in England, never leave the country, and do nothing but study their customs all your life."

Dion laughed, and remembered his mother's trials in the old days.

"*Don't* you agree with me that India is much

more comfortable, easier, nicer than England for those who are poverty-stricken?" persisted the lady, who was a "Quai-hai" to the backbone.

"I daresay—but it seems to me it doesn't much matter where you are!" he replied, with vague pessimism—for a girl walking across the lawn beside a dowdy little woman had of a sudden caused him to think of Anne Crivener, and whenever he thought of Anne Crivener he was apt to fall into the depths of despondency. It was chiefly for this reason that he made a practice of occupying mind and body unceasingly that he might think of her as little as possible.

The Colonel's widow observed that his attention had wandered; she put up her eye-glasses to see what had lured it away. "Good gracious!" turning in excitement to look for her daughter. "Edith, *who* is that?" She pointed over the lawn.

Mrs. Stapely darted forward, brisk and lively, a happy hostess, for was she not entertaining the whole Station and with the minimum of expense? Cakes and sweets had all been made under her strict supervision, the cream she had skimmed with her own hands, the milk-punch and ginger-wine she had brewed at the proper season in the back veranda; everything was "quite nice" without the least extravagance.

"What is it, mother?" she asked.

"Captain Devasse and I want to know who that girl is—do you see—walking across the lawn with

the missionary woman. Look at her dress, her gloves, her parasol—her *hat!*" The speaker's voice rose with each word. "What is she doing here, and with the Williamses, too?"

"Where?" queried Edith Stapely, with interest. "Oh, I see! They have just arrived; I must run and speak to them. That girl must be Miss Crivener, old Padre Williams' step-daughter. She was to arrive yesterday from England, I know."

At that moment Captain Devasse made her jump by shouting "*What? Who?*" in her ear, and then proceeded to hustle her down the veranda steps as though he had suddenly gone out of his mind. "But I know that girl!" he was saying breathlessly as he hurried his hostess across the path and over the grass. "I know Miss Crivener! Come along, Mrs. Stapely. What the dickens does it all mean!"

And presently he was shaking hands with Anne —actually with Anne Crivener—whose face had haunted his memory and wrung his heart for over a year; whose presence he had imagined was denied to him indefinitely. There followed a confused moment of greeting. Mrs. Stapely was asking questions; Miss Williams was introducing her step-sister, and Anne was smiling. Dion controlled himself with a violent effort, and stood aside while the others exchanged polite remarks.

"I have been so looking forward to our meeting," Mrs. Stapely said, "Miss Williams has told us all about you! I do hope you will like India and not find us too hopelessly old-fashioned." Then she

turned to Dion: "You and Miss Crivener are old friends? How curious! Do take her round the garden, Captain Devasse, and see that she has tea, and all she wants." To the radiant Sophia: "Will you come with me, Miss Williams, and we will make up a set of badminton."

So Anne Crivener and Dion Devasse found themselves walking between pink and white oleander bushes, in a preliminary silence. The sun glared down on the lawn, kept green and fresh only by persevering attention, on the crudely coloured flower-beds, on the yellow, sandy gravel at their feet. Shrill and gay the voices of the tennis and badminton players smote on their ears—the atmosphere was charged with colour, and sound, and movement. Anne turned with laughter in her eyes to the man by her side. "Well," she said, "am I a ghost?"

"By Jove!" he gasped, "I can't believe it! What—*what* are you doing here? Why are you in India, and in Sika of all places? What does it mean?"

Anne unfurled her parasol—a thing of rose-hued chiffon, with an agate and silver handle. Her exquisitely tinted face was framed by the glowing background.

"My people live here," she said, calmly serious; "my mother is Mrs. Williams, the missionary's wife."

Captain Devasse strove to hide the amazement he felt. Never had he met, never had he even heard of the Williamses during the year he had been sta-

tioned at Sika! He knew that a little colony of missionaries lived on the borders of the native city; and now, of a sudden, he recalled, without reason, the face of the man he had seen preaching in the bazaar, "the fellow out of a stained glass window." But that Anne should be living with such people, should actually belong to them, seemed to him incredible. It was like a dream, he thought—only that in a dream one was never surprised at anything, however preposterous.

Anne smiled slowly. "I suppose it must seem very extraordinary to you," she said. "I can hardly believe it myself! Of course, I knew you were here —do you remember giving me your address that day in St. James's Park? I very nearly told you then about my mother, but somehow I didn't——" Now she gave him, briefly, her mother's history; and he listened in wonder, for, like the rest of Anne's friends and acquaintances, he had always understood that she was an orphan. "I never knew myself, till I was seventeen, that my mother was alive," she concluded, "and Granny did not want to give it out. You see, as long as Granny was alive she had the first claim on me; but since her death I have been feeling more and more strongly how wrong it was to ignore my mother any longer. And so—I came to her."

Dion gazed at Anne with eyes that crowned her a Blessed Saint.

"You think I did right?" she appealed softly.

His admiration for her behaviour almost choked him. "It was just like you!" he said huskily.

"Well, I felt confident before I came that it was the only thing to do. But now," she paused, as though puzzled and distressed, "I am not quite so sure. I realise that I am a square peg in a round hole, or whatever the expression is—you know what I mean—and perhaps it was only selfish of me after all—I so wanted to know my mother——" she broke off significantly.

He waited, tenderly tactful; then with anxious interest he asked about her life at Crivener.

"Oh! it was just what I expected," she returned, with bitter indifference, "no better, no worse. A comfortable home, of course, but not a very pleasant position."

"And do you mean to live out here, Anne? What will you do in the hot weather? How will you put up with Indian life—and not even the ordinary official life, either? You'll hate it."

"Oh! don't ask me questions I can't answer! I am not going to think about the future. I daresay I shall like India. I enjoy the sun, and the bright colours, and I am with kind, good people. Perhaps I shall take to mission work, and wear grey flannel garments like my step-sister."

"And your mother—what is she like?" he asked with a certain human curiosity.

"She is faded, and thin, and quiet. She works very hard among the native women and girls, and

over the housekeeping. I mean to help her with the housekeeping if she will teach me. I think she seems happy to have me with her."

"Of course she is! Anne, you are an angel."

"I am rather afraid I shall be, if I go on like this! Now tell me about yourself, Dion. How are you getting on, and have you paid your debts, and do you like India?"

Quickly he told her of his change of fortune, and she had her surprise and congratulations all ready. They talked intimately of the matter until Anne suggested that perhaps they ought to go back to the other people.

"Not yet, wait a little," implored Dion. "Let's go along that path between the orange trees. Doesn't the fruit look jolly among the leaves? But the local orange is a disappointment; it's all skin and pips and pulp. Fruit out here is a sell. It seems to me that wherever you go in India you have to send somewhere else for your mangoes, and bananas, and pineapples, and oranges." He plucked a vivid orange with a loose, oily skin, and held it by the stalk to which hung a few glossy leaves.

Anne took it from him and sniffed it. "Even now it smells of the blossom," she said. "It reminds me of weddings."

This remark had the result of liberating a speech that Dion had hitherto kept from his lips with valiant endeavour.

"I must say it, I *must,* Anne—don't be angry.

I want you to promise me something, really promise it before we go back to all those confounded people——"

He stopped and faced her on the pathway, tall, broad, handsome—a gentleman; so clean, so well groomed, physically so pleasing against this Eastern background of fruit-laden orange trees that, by contrast, accentuated his English appearance. Just then a slatternly native, with ragged turban and scant clothing, slunk sideways through the trees, regarding the couple with interested wonder. His Oriental mind supposed that they were hiding from the rest of the sahibs and memsahibs because they were ashamed of their intercourse. Devasse had been long enough in the East to feel angrily conscious of the meaning in the furtive dark face. He snatched the orange from Anne's grasp and flung it with successful aim at the intruder with a command, in execrable Hindustani, to "be off." The garden coolie disappeared with prudent haste, more than ever convinced that all white people were hopelessly insane.

"Now," said Captain Devasse, turning again to the astonished Anne. "This is what I ask you to promise me: That if ever you feel you could marry me—that you find you love me well enough—you will tell me. I know you wouldn't marry any fellow unless you cared for him—and I am not the sort of man to want to marry even *you* unless you felt all right about it."

Anne looked at the oranges glowing among their dark greenery; then down at the toes of Dion's correct brown boots on the powdered gravel; then, with a swift upraising of her eyes, at his face—his sunburned, candid face, which told so plainly of his trusting disposition. It was like the face of a child who has never known need of deceit or concealment. For a sharp moment the difference of his nature as compared with her own smote Anne with a sense of shame, and a revulsion of feeling against her subtlety almost nauseated her. She was the snarer—Dion her victim. Yet, after all, was she not working for their mutual advantage? If, when the time came, she told Dion she loved him and would marry him, would he not, in his ignorance, consider himself the happiest being on earth, and why should he ever be disillusioned? And would not she herself have gained all that, to her, meant happiness?—money, independence, position, an adoring indulgent husband. Dion would get no bad bargain; she knew she would be a wife of whom any man might feel proud—a wife, moreover, who would never cause him to repent having married her!

"Only promise me, Anne," he urged, "and I will be patient. I will never worry you. I will be just your friend—your devoted friend of old days—till you tell me either to go or stay."

She turned from him slightly. Something held her from meeting his honest eyes.

"Very well," she said, with apparent reluctance. "I promise."

They went back between the orange trees to where people were clustering about tables, and laughing and talking in groups. All eyes were upon the stranger as she moved along the path, and questions were rife as to who she was, and whence she had come; and Mrs. Stapely was stormed by all the bachelors of the Station for introductions. Anne was graciously amused. It all seemed to her very trivial and second-rate. But she stood beside her hostess with a glow at her heart, for it was not as if she had come out to this odious country, among commonplace people, in vain!



CHAPTER VII

THE day before Oliver Wray returned to Sika he halted only three or four miles from the city, in order to visit the last of the villages that Mr. Williams had been obliged to omit from his recent tour. But though the march before him next morning was therefore trifling, he rose very early, because he had a great wish to see the dawn break over a spot that had long held for him a subtle fascination.

So, as the moisture of the night was being sucked from the earth by the eager sun in rolls of misty vapour, he stood outside his little single-pole tent and gazed across a wide plain where, in ages past, had gleamed temples, monasteries, towers, and the buildings of a sacred city. Now the golds and crimsons of early morning fell upon ruin and desolation. The broken ground was strewn and cumbered with ancient remains of wall and foundation, scattered fragments of ornamental sculpture, masses of crumbling brick, mounds covered with coarse, rustling vegetation—a veritable cemetery of dead mysteries whose perishing tombstones revealed, even to the most learned archæologist, but a fraction of the secrets buried beneath. From out the *débris* rose a massive tower, battered, defaced, shorn of its crown,

thatched now with waving grass, and even a few stunted, weakly trees—a melancholy memorial to the greatest reformer, save One, that the world has ever known.

Oliver Wray stood and watched the exultant light increase and spread over the spot where Buddha had first made known the mysterious conviction that had come to him through an agony of austerity and contemplation—the doctrine sent forth to all Eastern Asia—that there is no separate Supreme Deity, but that each man may triumph over moral corruption through a selfless life and so be absorbed at last into Nirvana. As he gazed, this strenuous follower of Christ's teaching, the desolation before his eyes seemed to fade and transform into a stretch of forest with pleasant glade and cooling stream—where the deer wandered unafraid, and the quiet was made sweeter only by the whisper of leaves and the music of the birds. Then, slowly, the fair surroundings melted into the presentment of a central figure—a thin form poorly clad, with feet bare and shaven head, yet having a certain princely dignity: the face radiant, unearthly, benevolent, beautiful with the calm certainty of one who has searched for truth, and believes, after long suffering, that he has found it. . . .

A gentle touch on the missionary's arm made him turn quickly, confused and startled, dazed with the sudden wrench from dream to actuality, to see a slender Hindu youth standing by his side. Evidently

the young man was of a high caste and belonged to prosperous people; his coat and turban were of purple silk, a valuable Kashmere shawl was slung about his shoulders, for the morning air was sharp; uncut precious stones set in clumsy silver rings decorated his fingers, and he smelled of some musky perfume.

"Sahib!" he said softly; and gazed at Wray with liquid eyes that had unnaturally long lashes—eyes too large for the delicate, wheaten-coloured face. Their depths held a weariness that seemed to speak of the ancient world, of cults and customs handed down unchanged through countless generations. On his forehead was the symbol, the sign of the god he had worshipped at the local shrine already that morning; and a sacred marigold, bright and pungent, was stuck behind one ear.

"What is it?" inquired the missionary, with grave civility.

As he spoke there flashed through his mind a humorous realisation of the contrast they must present as they faced each other in the exhilarating sunshine. The Englishman, Western and prosaic in orthodox clerical garb of grey material suitable to the climate, on his head a pith helmet, than which nothing can be more unpicturesque, on his feet ugly, serviceable boots; the native, oiled, scented, exotic, jewels in his ears, on his hands, at his throat, dressed fastidiously in rich colours, having a feminine grace of carriage, and a languid indifference of manner.

Wray almost smiled, but commanded his severe, clean-shaven face, and his expression became earnestly attentive.

"What is it?" he repeated.

The other glanced round uneasily, as though fearing that he might be overheard.

"Sahib, but yesterday thou wert speaking to my father's people in yonder village; it is my father Rampal Singh, Rajah, who is lord of the land hereabouts." He waved his supple brown hand towards an artificial hillock in the near distance, on the summit of which was perched the family castle, a rude native fortress built of mud and bricks, surrounded by a wall. "My name," he added, "is Ramanund."

"Yes," said Wray, "I was preaching to some of your father's people in the village over there last evening. I was telling them of Jesus Christ—He who came from God to give us new life and hope."

The other nodded. "I listened, too, standing apart, though my father would be angry did he know. For this reason did I send my horse, but now, to wait behind the mango trees, and came to seek thee alone on foot that none might carry tales. I heard thy words, Sahib, and there are matters of which I would ask thee."

He paused and rubbed one ankle against the other, nervous at the prospect of voicing his thoughts. Wray was aware of how intensely natives dislike the feeling of self-consciousness, and also of how they appreciate patience. So he waited,

till, encouraged by the inquiring kindness in the Englishman's eyes, Ramanund spoke again.

"Sahib, when I heard thee tell of miracles and wonders wrought by thy Holy One during his incarnation, I desired greatly to tell also of the mighty and glorious acts of Krishna and other of our own gods when they dwelt on earth, and to ask if thy God had accomplished aught more powerful than they?"

Wray was well accustomed to this sort of question.

"Yes. He did better than they, and is doing it now, for He can turn men's hearts to goodness, and purity, and kindness. He needs no propitiation, no gifts as bribes for blessings, only a stainless life which belief in Him will bring, such a life as He Himself led on earth. Tell me, which of the gods of thy faith committed no evil, or even strove to live in such a manner as do even many of thine own priests and pundits?"

The young man looked puzzled and interested. He hesitated for a moment, then burst out:—"Sahib, it is truth, and I know it, that the gods did much that may be accounted evil, and that they are made wroth not by ill deeds but by the omission of offering and observance. Still,"—with a touch of defiance—"having supreme power, why should they not use it as they please? To the powerful there is no fault. Does not the sun cause famine as well as growth?"

Wray looked into the sombrē eyes and saw that dēep down in the young man's heart, beneath the crust of Pantheism and superstition, there throbbed the sense of right and wrong, confused and weak though it might be. He longed passionately to lead this groping soul to the truth, and he began to speak simply, yet with tense meaning and conviction. To and fro they paced in the yellow sunlight, while green parrots, with scarlet-tipped beaks and tails, screamed and flashed above their heads towards the crops, grey partridges called and scuttled among thē ruins, crows and mynas flapped and fought on the patch of ground from which the missionary's little camp had just been moved. Away in the mango-grove some pea-fowl were saluting the new day with piercing, discordant cries. Everywhere rose a clamour of animal life—from the sharp chirrup of squirrels about their feet, to the distant bellow of cattle being driven from the village to graze in the jungle.

"And the Book that tells of thy Master's life and teaching, is it written so that such as I may read it? Rajah Rampal Singh, my father, is of the old order of thought; what was enough for our ancestors is enough for him and his. The Brahmin Pundits have taught me; I am accounted learned in the wisdom of our people; but my desire is to go to college and be taught English, and that desire my father will not grant. No English have I learned, only the ancient wisdom of our Holy Books,

and," he added naïvely, "they are so many, and so bewildering, no man may hope to read them in a lifetime."

Wray drew a Hindi Testament from his pocket. "Take this and read it," he said, "and later, maybe, we shall again meet on this spot and have further talk."

Ramanund hesitated to take the book. Wray knew why. "The cover is of paper," he said calmly, and tapped the shiny, Sunday-school binding.

With a courteous acknowledgment, the youth received the volume, turned the leaves over for a moment with eager curiosity, and then hid it beneath his coat with a furtive glance towards the fort.

"Shortly must I return to my father's house," he said, "but there are one or two matters still on which I would question thee. Tell me, the life that was led by thy Holy One, was it not of asceticism and victory over the flesh, even as are the lives of our yogis who seek peace through penance?"

"Assuredly in a sense was His life somewhat as that of a yogi," answered Wray, "but from a different motive. The yogi's life is for self-benefit; he withdraws himself from others, he does no good to others. Jesus Christ 'went about doing good.' There is the difference."

"Then again, Sahib, is it possible for a man to retain his caste unbroken and yet to follow Christ?"

"It is not possible," said Wray firmly. "Do not the rules and ceremonials of caste enjoin avoidance and contempt of others? Is it not concern for self throughout? Does it teach that truth and charity out-value all else?"

He felt his companion shrink from him involuntarily. The Rajah's son might be cultured, learned, even beyond his years, in the inactive wisdom of past centuries, but his mind, unexpanded by modern thought and education, was trammelled and paralysed by that old knowledge. He was bound, in spite of his ambition, to the unyielding code of creed and custom that will tolerate anything but the violation of caste, that ancient system of tyranny, seemingly solid and immovable as the great tower before them, yet, like the tower itself, crumbling slowly, tangled over with weed and parasite, a melancholy relic of bygone grandeur.

"Without doubt, Sahib," agreed the native, with the inborn good manners of his race, "and I will ponder upon thy words. But of thy kindness answer me yet on another matter that burns my lips. It is this; at times do I and my people repair to Sika, to our palace on the banks of the sacred river, that we may bathe and worship at the auspicious seasons. While there have I seen the English priests, the Holy men of Christ, and of them and their customs have I talked with the Brahmins and Pundits of our faith. And although these learned men respect the priests of the Christians

as wise men, good and charitable, worthy guides to human knowledge, they ask where is the renunciation of the followers of Christ? Have they not bungalows like unto other sahibs? and women, and servants, and offspring? Do they not have three, four meals in the day and drive forth in a carriage to eat the air, and sleep on beds and wear good raiment? Sahib, thy pardon for these words; I do not mock. I but ask for understanding. It may be right according to the Christian Scriptures, but the Brahmins maintain that it is not what the people regard as a holy man with a message to deliver. Why——"

Abruptly he broke off, glanced quickly over his shoulder, and then with swift, almost ignominious retreat made for the mango-grove and disappeared among the trees, without explanation and before the missionary had time to speak.

Immediately the astonished Englishman perceived the reason of this sudden flight. A cloud of dust was approaching from the direction of the fort, along the rough road that was little more than a cart track. In the middle of the cloud rolled and rumbled an antiquated barouche with the Rajah seated inside it—a stout figure with a round, pock-marked countenance, a brocade satin coat of pale blue and gold, a tight yellow turban, and a dyed moustache. Opposite him sat a repulsive-looking old native with a small, evil face. With much noise and ostentation the carriage passed along,

preceded and followed by tatterdemalion outriders. The Rajah stared with insolent hauteur at the plain grey figure of the English Padre, and Wray turned involuntarily towards the mango-grove, hoping with human sympathy that Ramanund had escaped his father's notice. It was a relief to see a moving puff of dust in the distance that might have been raised by the galloping of a horse. Ramanund would be at home long before the cavalcade returned from the morning drive.

The Rajah with his retinue clattered out of sight, and Wray summoned his modest little bamboo cart with the cheap country-bred pony that had waited ready harnessed since the striking of the camp. He climbed into the vehicle, and Ramanund's words returned to him with unpleasant reminder, "Do they not drive in a carriage and sleep on beds and wear good raiment." More than once this problem had stirred uneasily at the back of his mind and threatened to give trouble. Now, as he bumped and jerked over the uneven road, it arose definitely and clamoured for recognition, obliterating all else from his thoughts. He drove through the village scarcely heeding his surroundings, to which, usually, he was so keenly alive. Most of the native men had already gone out to the day's work in the fields, but a few laggards moved along, their cotton wrappers folded about their noses, ears, and mouths, according to the sensible native custom that is not only a protection from the chill of dawn,

but a safeguard against the malarious vapours that rise from the earth before the sun has had time to render them innocuous. Old people squatted in the open, trying to warm their shrunken bodies; cripples, idiots, and other useless members of the community, as well as groups of women and naked children, gathered to watch the sahib go by. One and all they stared at him with listless interest, and of a sudden a truth he had long been loth to acknowledge forced itself upon him with a sharpness that was almost physical pain—to these people he was just a sahib who was paid to come among them and preach the sahib's religion; and in no other way did he differ from the rest of the sahibs who helped to govern the country.

He left the village behind him and got on to the smooth high road that led to Sika, and through his troubled mind slid the past five years like a panorama vivid and distinct with phase and incident. Here was his early struggle with the language, his arduous study of the literature of the country; his first attempt at teaching in the schools; his first sermon in the vernacular. Then came what he had believed to be his first conversion, followed quickly by an arid waste of disappointment; then a period of dogged labour without rest or recreation, with little moral stimulant and but small encouragement. True he had taught much and with comparative success; he had sown some good seed; had helped to fit orphan boys and girls to earn honest

livelihoods; twice in the five years had he brought a genuine convert to baptism. But he was painfully conscious of the slow advancement; of the disheartening lack of spiritual progress in this country so old in wisdom and civilisation yet drugged still with the powerful narcotic of idolatry. Honestly he questioned now if, after all, the right note had ever been struck? It might be true—what the young Brahmin had repeated to him—that in India the popular conception of a great reformer was not a " Sahib," however virtuous and learned, with creature comforts about him, a wife, children, and home. And perhaps, to touch the hearts of these people with any general success, Christianity should be Easternised—ideas and customs, that to the English Christian seem a very part of his faith, should be separated from the teaching. He could understand that the life of the ordinary missionary, though in truth a life of sacrifice, hard work, and comparative poverty, might easily present to the devout Hindu an unpardonable spectacle of self-indulgence in a prophet of religion.

He drove on through the sun-bathed landscape, taking no note of the brilliant greens and yellows of the cold weather crops, or the picturesque groups of travellers along the grand trunk road—family parties in long, low carts drawn by sleepy bullocks, human bundles balanced on weedy ponies, pedestrians with their entire worldly property slung across their shoulders. He saw nothing external, for his

conversation with the son of Rajah Rampal Singh had churned up mind and memory so that he sat in the cart gazing before him in abstraction, holding the reins mechanically, permitting the pony to go its own unwilling pace.

Now he looked back on his Oxford days when as a dreamy, impressionable youth he had been drawn into the "religious" set, had become friends with earnest-minded young men, whose burning enthusiasms and convictions, untempered by years or experience, carried them to a pitch of mental excitement that was subtly infectious. He was the eldest son, heir to a property which, though of no great consequence, had been in the family for generations; and there was serious trouble when Oliver announced his intention of taking orders and devoting his life to the crusade against idolatry in the East. So intense was the father's indignation and distress that the son felt constrained to give way so far as to remain in England and work as a curate in the East-end of London. But with the death of old Squire Wray the Master's command to go forth into all lands and preach the Gospel had pressed again on the young man's mind with such vital insistence that he felt he could disobey the call no longer. Ah! what a time of trial and difficulty that had been! On all sides was he told that he had no right to neglect the duties that had come to him by inheritance; universally was he

blamed by his own people when he handed over everything to his next brother by deed of gift, retaining only sufficient for his own needs and charities. Then, impervious to advice and opinion, he had sailed for India, free to follow the calling to which, he felt confident, he was predestined.

As Wray drove into the city the streets were awake, humming with life, throbbing with the energy that pertains only to the morning. Pilgrims were arriving from every quarter of India, weary with their travels, yet uplifted by the joy of reaching this holy spot—holy and unchanging from time immemorial. Aged people were borne along by their relatives to die within sight, at least, of the River of Purification; beggars, priests, fakirs, devotees of every known Hindu sect, crowded the narrow passages, and rapid were the profits of the dealers in brass and clay images, brisk the sales, to ardent worshippers, of garlands and oil and grain—offerings for the deities of the many shrines. The clear, cold weather atmosphere vibrated with sound—the pulsing of drums, the clang of temple bells, the cry of the mendicant priest, "I am a Brahmin—give me food!" the voices of happy children, scolding women, busy men. And in painful contrast, midst all the clamour and movement, a small funeral procession passed along towards the cremating-ground; the corpse of a child wrapped in white, stiffly outlined, tied to a string bedstead. The

bearers ran with a sort of jog-trot that yet was curiously impressive, and called as they ran, "Ram! Ram! Ram is the true God!"

To the missionary the air was tainted, heavy with idolatry; and coming, as he had, from the open country and the simplicity of the villages, it sickened his soul with extra revulsion as the incarnation of everything evil—as a vampire that sucked all purity from the spirit leaving corruption only. Still, a vampire that enslaved and bewitched all who yielded to her spell! Sometimes he was even conscious himself of the terrible fascination of this Power of Darkness—when, as now, the bells of the temples rang, cries of prayer and praise echoed from the walls, and the idols in their sanctuaries looked on with eternal passivity and cold, stony stare. He could well imagine the frenzied emotion of it all, the splendour, the madness as well as the degradation of idolatry; and the desire for protection from disease and disaster.

To help to vanquish this terrible foe he had come out to India, he had foregone the sweets of existence, social position, family affection, friends —and there were times when he felt helpless and exhausted with the battle, almost willing to admit that the enemy was too strong. Already in a few yards he passed hundreds of shrines, multitudes of gods let into the walls, placed above the doorways, fixed between the dwellings—idols everywhere. Siva in his various incarnations, Kali, Ganesh, Han-

uman, Durga—the whole accursed host, staring, grinning, brandishing arms and legs and weapons, stained red as with blood symbolising sacrifice, murder, wickedness. His spirit sank low; he was hot and dusty, his mind and brain felt exhausted, for the interview with Ramanund and the thoughts it had generated, caused him acute mental unrest. He pushed his way through the steaming crowd, not only of human beings, but of monkeys, sacred bulls, pariah dogs, and hastened to reach the cool stillness of his little bungalow, that he might think and pray alone.

As he neared the temple that in the whole city was the most important, as being dedicated to the reigning deity of the place, the murmur and movement of the crowd betokened some small excitement. Wray looked ahead with attention; and just then the throng parted, and he saw walking in the middle of the narrow street a lithe, graceful figure, stepping lightly and with confidence—the figure of an English girl with bright brown hair and long, brilliant eyes, clad daintily in softest white, shod with little tan shoes. At her bosom blazed a cluster of gaudy marigolds that sounded a note of violent contrast, yet only emphasised her beauty. A sacred bull, sleek and arrogant, brushed past her as he foraged unrebuked among the stalls for grain. Staring at her with objectionable interest were Brahmins, calmly superior as holding themselves part of the divine; citizens, villagers, pilgrims, and

grotesque specimens of the religious fanatic half drunk with hemp, hideously maimed with bodily penance.

To Wray the reaction seemed violent—from the poisonous influence of idolatry in positive form, to a vision that gratified the eye and the senses. He felt as though he were in a dream, as though his fate hung on the moment, and he had been forced to hold out unwilling arms to some loathsome goddess, when lo! she had transformed herself into a creature of gentle loveliness, subtle, alluring, the easier to tempt him to her allegiance. Resolutely he cleared his mind of fancies; he recognised that this turmoil of emotion was material and to be accounted for. He had eaten nothing that morning, his nerves were ajar, he was physically low. Before him was no mirage of a pagan goddess, but a flesh-and-blood English girl who looked as if she belonged to the world he had forsaken.

And she was alone in the bazaar, unwitting of the contemptuous relish in the eyes that gazed upon her; of the remarks that were being uttered by lips attuned from babyhood to all that was gross. In one burning moment all his concern and devotion for the spiritual welfare of these people, to whom he was dedicating his life, went from him, driven out by a savage instinct of antagonism and defence. The men around him were no longer his equals in the sight of God, to be pitied for their blindness to the truth, to be loved, and saved, and helped, and

excused; but members of a vitiated race devoid of chivalry, without reverence for womanhood, to whom the female is naught but a necessary evil, or at best but an instrument for pleasure. His calling was forgotten. He sprang from his trap, cuffed the head of an obtrusive stripling, and shoved aside, with angry authority, a nearly nude creature whose bhang-swollen eyes spoke a language that was sacrilege to youth and purity. Hat in hand he stood in the girl's path, and they faced each other—two present-day, conformable English people, isolated among an Oriental crowd that was draped in the garb of two thousand years ago, whose thoughts and characteristics had changed almost as little as the fashion of their outward covering.

"You are Miss Crivener," he said, certain of her identity.

She looked at him a little startled.

"Oh! Yes!" Pleasant and courteous she held out her hand. "Of course. I have heard about you." With a spasm of inward laughter she remembered Sophia's hints as to the advantages of a match between herself and this man.

"Will you let me drive you home? I am on my way to the Mission House now."

There was more command than invitation in his tone. Anne felt surprised and also a trifle exasperated. Why should she curtail her walk at his bidding? This was her first visit on foot, alone, to

the bazaar; and she was quite enjoying the sunshine, the noise, the bright colours, the novelty. True, the streets were dirty and the smells anything but agreeable, but why should Mr. Wray interfere? could he be in league with Sophia?—she smiled at the notion.

"Oh! Please don't bother about me," she said, coldly careless. "I am not going home yet. I have wanted to investigate the bazaar on my own account ever since I arrived."

"But you ought not to be here alone!" Wray interrupted with impatience; he was feverishly anxious to get her away. "It doesn't do for an English lady to walk through a native city by herself."

"Oh! Nonsense!" Anne had never been restricted in her movements at home. Granny had always believed in her capacity for "taking care of herself." "I shall be all right. Don't let me keep you."

With a gay little nod she would have passed on, but he laid his hand on her arm.

"Miss Crivener,—forgive me, and don't think me too presuming, but you *must* come with me now. I will explain—Believe me it is necessary. Come."

She looked into the serious grey eyes and felt a thrill of interest. It was a fine face. In a way it suggested to her the little bust of Cicero that had always stood on Granny's bedroom mantelpiece. Cicero must have looked like this man at this man's

age,—with the same firm modelling of head and face, the same expression of thought and culture and kindliness. Why was he a missionary wasting his brains and soul and personality on a lot of black people? And what was the matter with the creature that he would not permit her to go for a harmless walk by herself if she wished? But Anne enjoyed an experience; she decided that, under the circumstances, she would allow herself to be bullied and taken home like a truant child. She acquiesced with a pretty shrug of her shoulders and a laugh of surrender.

"Very well—I suppose you must have some good reason, and perhaps the sooner I know why I am doing wrong the better!"

With his help she clambered into the rickety little bamboo cart. He followed her, and then, the syce running and shouting in front, they made a difficult progress through the stagnant crowd.

"Well—are we on the verge of a mutiny, or what did you think would happen to me?" she questioned—provoked by his silence.

He hesitated. The situation that had aroused his indignation was past; the storm of feeling had subsided, and his mind was regaining its normal calm.

"It's rather difficult to explain," he said, looking between the pony's ears, and so avoiding the upturned face at his side. "You see, the Oriental attitude towards women is so different from ours. Your walking about like that, without a man of

your own race to protect you, might be quite misinterpreted by the people."

"But why should one worry about what they think? They are only natives," she protested.

He winced and flushed. "Don't say that. I can't bear to hear you speak like that. It isn't fair, and you wouldn't do it if you knew more about them. Their civilisation is far older than ours, their capabilities are extraordinary; the wisdom of their literature and their philosophers is profound, and often contains the highest spiritual thought."

"Yet I mustn't walk about among them alone," she interrupted.

He ignored the invidious remark, and continued in a low, tense voice as though the more anxious to vindicate his cause because he had just been rendered so acutely conscious of its weakest point.

"I think it is the hope of every Englishman of the right sort in India that having, as a nation, established peace and order out here, a higher standard of morality may develop generally in the native mind,—that the people may be brought, through Christ, to practise truth, and virtue, and honour; most assuredly, they recognise goodness when they meet it!—a fact that is all important for us to remember,—for the people of India appreciate a brave and wise leader. A shrewd old missionary who worked here years ago used to say that the Hindus are vastly better than one would expect to find them considering their beliefs, while on the

other hand we fall far below the perfection to which our religion calls us; that if Hinduism were allowed full power over its followers society could not exist, and if *we* were to carry out faithfully the teaching of the Gospel we should soon soar to the level of the angels!"

"I know nothing about it," said Anne indifferently.

She had not come out to India to study the native mind, but to marry Dion Devasse, and she was not at all interested in the missionary's theories, though, as an individual, he was certainly attractive. Sophia was right, the man was a gentleman, and evidently belonged to unexceptionable people; his voice, his manner, his appearance, conveyed the fact. Wray —Wray—had she and Granny ever known anyone of the name of Wray? She began to picture him in the regulation tailoring of the man of the world; in tweeds, in hunting kit, in London "get up," in dress suit. He would look at home in them all; he even contrived to look distinguished in the terrible Norfolk jacket he wore, with baggy trousers, a clerical waistcoat and collar, and a hideous, battered pith helmet! She glanced again at the clean-carven face, the expressive lines of mouth and chin, the mettle of the ice-grey eyes under brows black and straight. It might be interesting to see him in a real rage, not merely angry, as he undoubtedly had been just now with the natives around her in spite of his subsequent defence of the "dark

brother." It might be still more interesting to see him in love—he would make an ardent, masterful lover.—At this point Anne checked her thoughts aghast at her own vulgarity. Never before had she speculated as to the kind of lover a man would make! Was it possible that the climate and surroundings of this unspeakable country had already worked a deteriorating effect upon her mind? How disgusted Granny would have been with her! She felt angrily amused at her own backsliding.

"Of course," she heard Wray saying, conversationally, as though realising that his enthusiasm had met with no sympathy, "you can know nothing of the country—you have been out here such a short time."

"Yes, and I still feel as if I were dreaming, it is all so new, so different," she said, rather wistfully.

He felt a little sorry for her, guessing that she must find the days long and tedious, the company of Sophia and Mr. and Mrs. Williams uncongenial. He was aware, through Sophia, that mother and daughter had been strangers to one another, and he felt interested as to the present situation.

"I am sure if you studied the country you would find it worth while," he said tentatively, "you can't think how interesting the people are—their faiths and their superstitions, their history, from the coming of the Aryans—the mysterious fair-complexioned people who spoke Sanskrit, or "the pol-

ished language," the fabulous heroic stories connected with their wars and government—then the development of caste and the power and corruption of idolatry, which was afterwards checked for more than a thousand years by the wonderful teaching and example of Buddhism——"

He stopped himself, feeling that he was probably boring his companion.

"And why, if Buddhism was such a wonderful religion, didn't it last?" said Anne argumentatively, though without real interest. "Are none of these people Buddhists now?"

She glanced around at the unfamiliar faces, the Eastern clothing, the glimpses of what appeared to her the most primitive dwelling arrangements, and could scarcely credit that the history of these people contained anything of importance. The English girl, finished and accomplished, conversant with the art and literature of the day, had never realised that, in the first place, it was to the East that she, as a Westerner, owed her progress and cultivation, or that the East instead of advancing with the ages, had, like a matured old tree, stood still; while her influence, a seed carried to a foreign soil, had produced a different and vigorous plant full of the sap of energy and growth. Anne would have laughed had Mr. Wray told her that the elemental-looking umbrella, made of dried grass and leaves, that was borne past her now by an almost naked brown coolie, was the forerunner of her own pretty, pink parasol

with the silver and agate handle! Only, this grass-and-leaf shelter from sun and rain remained as such; while her own country had developed from it the silk-and-whalebone umbrella, and the ravishing sunshade!

Wray felt pleased that she had asked him a question, in spite of its somewhat antagonistic tone. "Buddhism," he said, perhaps with rather a pulpit air, "was overthrown because it was a religion without hope, impersonal, negative. Too cold and severe for human needs. It was not the real thing —only a forerunner of the true and only faith." He was conscious that he had adopted the explanatory tone that one uses with a child, and in some embarrassment he drew the whip gently across the pony's back, and hastened to tell her more lightly of the great age of the city, or rather, the site of the city, through which they were passing; for Sika had been in her glory when Nineveh and Babylon were striving for power one against the other.

"Perhaps Sika sent apes and peacocks to Solomon!" he said, looking down at her with a smile.

Anne smiled back, and asked him tactful questions, first about the city and its history—and then, with guile, about himself! But with the latter subject she had no success.

"I never think about it," he replied, when she inquired if he regretted England and English life; and apparently he did not hear her when she asked boldly, "Don't you ever look back?"

Instead, he pointed out, evasively, a noisy wedding procession that blocked a side street as they passed, and proceeded to tell her many curious details concerning Hindu marriage customs.

Anne felt baffled; and a keen desire to reach this man's inner life possessed her. She longed that he should confide in her; she wished to know of his difficulties and aspirations, his personal feelings; to hear the story of his past years, about his people, his childhood, his ideas for his own future.

"I will *make* him talk to me sooner or later," she said to herself, as they turned into the gate of the Mission compound. And the perfume of the roses in Sophia's patch of garden seemed, in some unaccountable manner, to quicken her interest in the missionary and render her vitally determined to acquire his friendship.

A figure in khaki uniform was seated in the veranda of the bungalow; and at the foot of the steps a native groom held the bridle of a big Australian charger.

"Oh!" said Anne blankly, "there is Dion Devasse."

"Who?" Wray asked.

"Captain Devasse. He is an old friend of mine. Do you know him?"

"No. But I am glad you have found an old friend here. It is nice for you."

His satisfaction was genuine; but Dion, when Anne introduced the two men, glared at the mis-

sionary with no friendliness. Why was Anne driving about with this "devil-dodger?" He recognised Wray as "the stained-glass saint" he had seen preaching in the bazaar the day he had "done" the river. If Anne wanted a drive she ought to have let him know, and so given him a reasonable excuse for seeing her so early in the morning, instead of his being forced to present himself on a feeble pretext.

"Stapely is rather bothered," he said, addressing Wray with self-conscious bluster. "I saw him just as I was coming off parade, and he said if I was going in this direction he'd be glad if I would take a message to the Mission House. The Chaplain's down with a bad go of fever, and could somebody from here take the service at the English Church on Sunday? Of course, Mr. Williams is being written to, but I suppose the longer notice he gets the better."

"Certainly. I will tell Mr. Williams. I don't suppose he is in yet. Nobody seems about."

He lifted the bamboo blind and glanced inside the deserted bungalow; then turned back and stood, politely patient, exchanging common-places with Miss Crivener and Captain Devasse.

Anne, regarding the two men before her, was sharply sensible of their contrasting types. Dion exhaled warm, pulsing life, was virile, material, a good deal of the perfect animal, yet at present without a trace of grossness—though perhaps in ten years' time he might thicken and grow coarse.

Alongside him was the slim, shapely figure of the missionary—symmetrical in spite of his unlovely clothes—with intellectual head and spiritual, earnest face. The one so entirely the child of man, the other—Anne felt suddenly disturbed and resentful, she moved uneasily to the door that led into the sitting-room as though vaguely desirous that Dion's visit should terminate.

"I must go and get tidy," she said with forced gaiety, "and, as that takes me a long time, I will say good-bye!"

"You are coming to the Club this afternoon?" Dion detained her with eager anxiety. "May I fetch you?"

"Oh, no, don't bother. I am not sure I shall go, and if I do I can easily take the cab of the country."

He made a little pleading movement towards her, understood well by Anne; but she shook her head with a confidential smile and passed through the doorway.

Captain Devasse and Oliver Wray were left alone together.

"Well, I must be off," said the soldier, and beckoned his groom.

"So must I," said the missionary, and nodding to each other perfunctorily they went their ways. Dion through the gate into the city to reach the cantonment road, Wray on foot across the compound to his quarters.

Anne watched the figure of the missionary from her bedroom window.

CHAPTER IX

DURING the next few days clouds began to spread over the sky—not in swollen masses, rolling and hurrying as though summoned to a conclave, after the manner of Western clouds, but in thin, furtive layers with almost imperceptible increase—a quiet herald of the coming rainfall of mid-winter; though they would gather and disperse again many times before rain came down. Anne was depressed by the absence of sunshine, by the soft greyness that crept over everything, giving her the sensation that she was seeing through slightly tinted glass; and she realised how impossible would be the East without its sun.

When the Williams family had gone out in various directions, busy and intent upon their work as usual, after the mid-day breakfast, Anne went to her room in search of occupation. Ever since her arrival at Sika she had found the days interminable. Her half-hearted attempts to help her mother with the housekeeping had come to nothing—she could not speak Hindustani to the servants, and she took not the smallest trouble to pick it up, since it was her intention to leave India directly she had the right to exert her influence with Dion Devasse.

Then Mrs. Williams was one of those people who will toil themselves into their graves, but are unable to exact work from others, and she continued to wear herself out over matters that might quite easily have been relegated to the servants under the supervision of even the inexperienced Anne. Sophia, being an enrolled member of the Mission, and in receipt of a salary, had quite as much to do as she could manage without injury to her health, and therefore she had no time to spare for housekeeping; whereas the mission work undertaken by Mrs. Williams was voluntary.

Anne was lonely. Mrs. Stapely continued to be kind and friendly, and had given her a standing invitation to spend as much time as she pleased at the Judge's bungalow; but Mrs. Stapely bored Anne, they had nothing in common with each other, and Babba was an intolerable nuisance, always with his mother, claiming her attention, shrieking when he was thwarted, asking ceaseless questions, and clinging to the visitor's skirts with his sticky fingers because he had discovered that it annoyed her. To Anne he seemed a gnome, a little evil sprite, and she told Dion she was positively afraid to be left alone with the child.

The rest of the Station population held no interest for her either; they were people she should never see again, people she never wished to see again, and though she was invariably pleasant and polite to them, according to her custom, they found her un-

satisfactory and rather alarming, and therefore they left her alone. Dion she was careful not to see too often. A few times in the mornings or evenings she had ridden with him, accepting the loan of one of his ponies; now and then he had driven her to the Club; they had met fairly often at the Stapelys'. But she gave him no encouragement to frequent the Mission House, and Dion was not over-anxious to go there, even to see Anne, unless she remained out of his sight for too long at a time. Books and magazines there were none in the Williams' bungalow, beyond the literature connected with the work. The garden was dusty and unattractive; the establishment devoid of the comfort that might have compensated for lack of amusement; and there was nothing in particular for Anne to do from morning till night.

This afternoon she tried to write letters, but after one to Uncle Richard had been accomplished there was no one else to whom she wished to write; how could she tell her friends that she was a member of a missionary household, and had seen nothing of the proverbial gaiety of Anglo-India, and was not leading the life of her own world? Failing letters, she mended her clothes (very badly) and cleaned her silver toilet things which Tabitha never touched; and afterwards she sat in a basket chair by the window and stared out blankly over the drab-coloured compound wondering if she wished to go to the Club and see Dion, and chatter and

idle in the reading-room, or whether she would rather remain here alone and undisturbed. And gradually the purpose and determination that had supported her, so far, amid her tedious surroundings, seemed to slip away from her, leaving her weak and inert. She no longer felt any particular desire to marry Dion; unaccountably the zest had gone out of the object that had brought her to India; it was all so much trouble; existence itself was an effort; she could have cried from sheer boredom.

Alarmed, she tried to force her mind to an appreciation of the future that lay before her as Dion's wife—the return to her cherished world of ease and pleasure and social supremacy; but the prospect no longer gave her the satisfaction that had carried her over the preliminaries of her enterprise, and on through the long dull days;—that had reconciled her to Sophia's platitudes and her mother's sad, depressing affection; also to her step-father's blunt and uncompromising attitude towards herself. Anne disliked Mr. Williams, though she had a genuine respect for his plain common-sense, his intense earnestness, and the rectitude of his life. She had an uncomfortable suspicion that he saw through her charming manners and plausible position in the household; and he had an irritating habit of remembering every word she said and commenting upon the least inaccuracy in her conversation, which was specially disconcerting to one who had been reared to lie freely rather than promote the faintest discord.

Presently the quiet of the house became unendurable. She almost determined to change her gown and drive to the Club, where she knew Dion was watching for her with restless expectation. But it would take half an hour to change; it was late now, and already growing dark; she did not want to go; she did not want to stay; she did not know what she wanted!—then she laughed at her own perplexity, and smoked cigarettes till she felt a trifle more contented, and realised that as the room was chilly with the approach of evening, a fire would probably revive her spirits and restore her sense of well-being. So Anne rose from her chair and went through the bungalow to the back veranda, from whence she called with persistence till she interrupted a reception that was being held in the kitchen by the cook; and with signs and a few words of broken Hindustani succeeded in making the bearer understand she wished him to light a fire in the sitting-room.

An hour later when John Williams came in she was, as usual, occupying the one comfortable chair which she had drawn up in front of the blazing log fire. A couple of down cushions, her own property, were behind her head; and she was reading a novel that Captain Devasse had procured for her from the Station library. The firelight burnished her thick waves of hair, her knees were crossed and one foot, in a ridiculous high-heeled shoe and lace stocking, was stretched towards the flames.

Mr. Williams looked at his step-daughter with disapproval. All day his wife and daughter had been toiling without thought or consideration for self, and this butterfly of a girl had done nothing. Her very pose of luxurious appreciation of the warmth of the fire, and the ease of the cushions, annoyed the missionary almost beyond control. It was perhaps fortunate for Anne that Sophia entered at that moment by another door, or she might have heard some unpleasant truths, for Mr. Williams was tired and worried and had scant patience to spare for his useless guest.

"The Drapers are coming to supper," announced Sophia, "then you can settle who is to take the service at the English church on Sunday." The question had already been discussed at breakfast.

"I expect it will have to be Draper," said Mr. Williams rather shortly. "I arranged some days ago to baptise a couple of orphan children next Sunday, and the ceremony can't be postponed now. The children whose parents were found dead outside the city after journeying from Scinde—you remember."

Sophia nodded. "The poor mites were skeletons when they were brought to the orphanage, and now they are such bright merry little people. The boy can already sing a bhajan (hymn)." She began to tidy the room with brisk energy, humming the tune of the orphan's bhajan; she folded up missionary papers, pushed chairs into their proper places,

and adjusted the burners of the lamps that had just been brought in.

"Wray told me this morning he would not be able to take the service. He is wanted at the boys' boarding school on Sunday," went on Mr. Williams as though speaking aloud to himself, while he pushed at a log with the toe of his thick boot. "There are his special Bible classes, too, and his corner of the native city where he always preaches on Sundays when he is not in camp."

Mr. Williams continued to soliloquise, almost as though he were making an excuse to enjoy the warmth of the fire. His elbow was on the mantelpiece, and he gazed down at the dancing flames. It appeared that the missionary in charge of a suburb of the city could not be spared either, and that another member was out in the district with the colporteur, preaching, and selling Bibles and tracts. So that unless Mr. Draper could claim very urgent duty elsewhere he was clearly the only person available to minister to the spiritual needs of the Anglo-Indian community next Sunday.

"How did you get on this afternoon, Father?" inquired Sophia.

Mr. Williams stirred himself and stood upright. He sighed before he answered. "The interview with the girl's relations was very trying, and the worst part of the case is that I don't feel certain of the girl herself. She professes a wish to become a Christian, but I can't help suspecting that she is

doing it to spite her people for some reason of her own. It is a most difficult case, and I must have time to think it well over, for until I am convinced of her sincerity I cannot baptise her."

"He has been out to a village six miles away this afternoon," explained Sophia to Anne, "trying to get at the truth about this native girl."

She came behind Anne's chair and leaned over the bright brown head of her adored step-sister, who endured the affectionate pattings and strokings with the utmost self-control.

"It is a most difficult case," repeated Mr. Williams. "Did you say the Drapers were coming to supper?"

"Yes. We haven't seen much of them in a social way since they returned from England, and they are most anxious to know Annie." Sophia dropped a kiss on the top of Anne's head.

"Then I will go to my room till they arrive. I have a long report to prepare. Wray is not coming in this evening. He said he wanted to visit old Nattoo in the Bazaar. The old man is very ill."

"How distressing it is that Nattoo will not declare himself a Christian," cried Sophia. "He *is* one you know, Anne, but he is afraid his grandsons will kill him if they find it out."

"Then it is hardly to be wondered at that he conceals the fact!" said Anne crisply; and Sophia laughed, accepting the remark as a joke.

Mr. Williams looked at the lazy form in the

chair with calm aversion, and went across the room to his study door. Anne felt a momentary compunction towards him. He was such a sound old fellow, so "game," such an enemy to everything false, a scorner of self-indulgence and idleness. How her presence must annoy him! It was really very hard that he should have any additional trials when his whole life was given over to work that was full of discouragement and anxiety. Well, she would send him a thumping subscription for the mission when she was Mrs. Dion Devasse, to make up for the vexation she had caused him! How worried he was over this tiresome Hindu girl who had been the principal topic of conversation in the Williams' household for the last week. Anne was sick of hearing how she had come voluntarily to the Mission House, while on a religious expedition to Sika with her people, and professed herself ready for baptism; and how she had made such a scene when the padre refused to perform the rite without more careful sifting, and had arranged to visit her the next day. Then, when he presented himself, she had denied all knowledge of his existence and declared she had never been near the Mission House; and later on, when she got back to her home, had sent him an urgent message to come and see her that she might explain her conduct.

Wretched little creature! thought Anne impatiently, and here was this good, sincere man, wasting his time, brains, and energies on a being whom he

suspected of pretending to seek after Truth that she might spite her relations!

"It will be so nice for the Drapers to meet you," said Sophia with complacence, when her father had disappeared. "You have only seen them in the distance, I think, so far. You were out when they came here to tea, and they were so disappointed."

She wandered rather aimlessly round the room, talking all the time. "They went home, you know, on account of Mrs. Draper's health, but Father thought it quite unnecessary that *Mr.* Draper should go too," she lowered her voice as though conscious that she was uttering treason, "we were so short-handed and he was quite well and did not need a change himself. They had a little disagreement about it—you know how Father sticks to his opinions! But," she added absolvently, "Mrs. Draper was very sadly, poor thing, and I daresay he could not bear to let her go all that way alone."

Anne nestled more comfortably into her cushions. "I suppose, as a matter of fact, missionaries have no business to marry at all and bring women to a trying climate and such hard work. Or, when it comes to a choice between the work and the wife it should be understood that the wife goes to the wall."

Sophia looked doubtful. She was always desirous of agreeing with Anne where possible. "Father thinks that missionaries *ought* to marry—if they marry the right sort of wives. Because the ladies

can be as useful in the Mission Field as their husbands; and think what an example to the natives a well-ordered Christian household may be—showing them the position that a true child, daughter, wife, and mother, may hold! Why, only to-day I have been seeing a poor Hindu widow who is treated in the most shameful way by her family—not allowed to eat with them, or to play with the children, or have any pleasures or comforts in life! She has to sleep on the floor, and fast, and do all kinds of uncomfortable things. And in the very household there is fearful ill-feeling because the eldest brother has taken a younger wife, and his other wife is very rebellious and makes the poor little thing's life a burden. They all told me their grievances—the widow, and the old wife, and the bride! I felt quite exhausted by the time I got away. You see, all this morning I had been teaching at the orphanage, and that is always trying work,—the girls are fidgety and inattentive and the boys are so lazy—there had been no breathing time, or else I should not have felt so fagged!"

"You look very tired," said Anne, "why don't you go and lie down before these people come to supper?"

"I can't," said Sophia, simply. "I have all these exercises to correct before to-morrow," she tapped a pile of note-books that she had laid on the table when she came in. "Miss Gage has been obliged to take leave and go home owing to family

troubles, and I am doing her school work, while mother has undertaken her zenana duties. You see we are short of workers as it is—and there is nobody to take Miss Gage's place. But she will be back, I know, as soon as she can."

Sophia gathered up the copy books as though reminded of the work that awaited her. "Mother will be very tired. She was worried to-day before she started out, because Tabitha had a silly quarrel with one of the Bible women, and it taxed her patience and wasted her time. She has double work to do just now, like me. When she comes in, will you persuade her to rest, Anne dear? You have more influence with her than any of us—and sometimes I think she looks so fragile I feel frightened!"

"Of course," said Anne, "but I don't suppose she will listen to me."

With a suspicion of reluctance Sophia left the room. Anne threw another log on the fire, and opened her novel again.

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She was startled when her mother appeared to see the weariness in her face and bearing. The worn, faded creature smiled at the picturesque figure basking in the firelight, and stood herself, for a few moments, enjoying the warmth and quiet after the clamorous claims of native women and children, and the sharp rawness of the cold-weather atmosphere outside. A prayer meeting for the women of the native congregation had concluded

the arduous day, and now Mrs. Williams looked wistfully at Anne, leaning back in the low chair, the firelight scintillating on her hair, twinkling on her beaded shoes, reflected in her rings and the diamond brooch at her throat. Then, of a sudden, she turned faint and clutched at the mantelpiece.

Anne sprang to her feet. "Mother, you are played out!" She took off the ugly hat and threw it on the floor; then forced the frail form down into the chair, among the cushions; drew off the clumsy, country-made boots, and rubbed the cold feet in their coarse stockings. Presently she ran into her own room and called Tabitha, into whose hands she thrust an indiarubber hot-water bottle, bidding her fill it at once and put it into her mistress's bed. From a drawer she took a flask, which Uncle Richard had filled with good old brandy before she left Crivener, and returned with it to the sitting-room. Mrs. Williams drank mechanically when Anne held it to her lips; then suddenly she pushed the girl and the flask away from her.

"Oh! my dear," she quavered, horrified at her own depravity, "I never touch stimulants!"

"It's medicine, mother—not stimulants," soothed Anne with a little coaxing laugh. "A doctor would perhaps have given you opium, or oxygen, or cocaine, something really wicked, you know, and then you might have contracted the habit and become lost to all sense of propriety! Think how dreadful. But this little dose," giving her another sip, "will

have no bad effects, and you will be grateful to Anne presently when you feel so much better. Now, come along, I am going to put you to bed till supper time, at any rate, and then you may feel equal to entertaining Mr. and Mrs. Draper—which, I am sure, is an ordeal. Come, take my arm. Tabitha has got your bed ready and I will undress you."

Murmuring weak protestations, Mrs. Williams allowed herself to be supported to her bedroom by her daughter; and presently she was lying in a condition of delicious relief and comfort, with a hot bottle at her feet, and an extra pillow beneath her head, and Anne's own eider-down covering her thin, chilled body. A sense of luxurious repose stole through her being, and her eyes closed in sleep. The brandy, the hot bottle, the deft ministrations of Anne seemed to have worked a miracle —not for many years had Mrs. Williams felt so at peace mentally and bodily. Anne waited till the gentle breathing of her patient satisfied her before she went back to the fire in the sitting-room.

For some time she stood looking down at the bright yellow flames that were surrounded by soft heaps of white ashes, and marvelled at the manner in which these people gave their lives to others. How they worked! How fervent they were! Mr. Williams was as harassed in mind about this miserable little Hindu hypocrite as if she had been his own daughter—he had journeyed twelve miles on a slow old pony that afternoon to try and save her

soul, and he would probably be obliged to sit up half the night to recover arrears of time over his sermons and accounts and reports. Sophia, too, was overworked in the absence of the zenana mission lady; and there was poor Mrs. Williams really ill and exhausted with the day's labour. In unwilling admiration the girl contrasted the lives of this little household with those of the people among whom she had been brought up—people who would sacrifice nothing that they wanted themselves, neither time, money, nor pleasure, whose easy, luxurious days were seldom disturbed by anything more serious than the departure of an invaluable cook, the failure of some important guest to keep an engagement, or the illness of a favourite lap-dog; people who lived long in spite of their self-indulgence, because they never strained mind or body beyond the point that suited them, and could command the most skilled advice and treatment the moment they were threatened with illness.

When the Drapers came in Anne was still standing motionless by the fire, a tall, gracious figure with perfect finish of appearance from her deftly arranged hair and the pearls in the lobes of her delicate ears, to her slim waist, her pink, polished nails, her dainty feet. The guests had walked over from their bungalow, which was on the other side of the native church, and they seemed to fill the room with the wraps from which they emerged. Anne assisted the lady out of an alpaca dust cloak,

beneath which was a woollen shawl covering a Shetland spencer, and when these were removed there stood a bunchy little person, in a brown merino dress with buttons down the front of the bodice, and a watch-pocket at the waist—it might have been the very gown in which Mrs. Williams was photographed as a girl, now grown old and wide and still more shapeless.

Mr. Draper was a middle-aged man with a chronic cough, a large mouth, a bald head, and an untidy beard, in which were apt to linger crumbs and drops of gravy, and other reminiscences of his latest meal. He asked Anne, rather truculently, if she were not exceedingly pained by the evidence of idolatry in India.

"I am so new to the country I have hardly dared to form any opinions about anything," said Anne with diplomacy, "but it does seem very dreadful!"

She glanced at him with appealing diffidence, and Mr. Draper straightway succumbed to her spell. He became gently superior, and pitifully tolerant of her obvious worldliness, and was talking to her almost as kindly as if she were a native convert, instead of practically a pagan, when Mr. Williams and Sophia joined them and announced that they had persuaded Mrs. Williams to remain in bed as she was over fatigued. After that they went in to a supper of sardines and cold meat and the staple Indian dish of dal and rice.

Anne found the evening tedious. Mr. Draper

and Mr. Williams talked "shop" without intermission, Sophia was unusually silent, and Anne supposed she was tired—it did not occur to her that Sophia was really unhappy about her step-mother, who had never collapsed in this way before. Therefore, Anne was forced to converse with Mrs. Draper, which she did valiantly, having the instinct of the born hostess. But Mrs. Draper, as well as her husband, regarded life as it were, from between mental blinkers; to use a needle and thread on Sunday would have been to break the Sabbath day, though probably the fourth Commandment was intended for the benefit of such people as herself, who worked far harder on Sundays than any other day of the week. She pitied the heathen from the bottom of her narrow, strenuous soul, and was miserable over their darkness (of spirit, not body). It was her firm belief that a special intervention of Providence "permitted" all her undertakings—from the expounding of a chapter to her Bible class, to the darning of her husband's socks—and when drawbacks and rebuffs were encountered, when circumstances seemed more than usually antagonistic to the cause for which she laboured, she suspected some divine purpose that might not be revealed, or some temporary triumph of the devil.

"One of the devil's favourite devices," she told Anne this evening, "is to get missionaries removed from a locality just when they are gaining positive influence. I have seen it so often." And she cited

their own case in being obliged to go home on account of her health. It seemed almost as if her belief in the devil was even more vital than her faith in Providence.

It was a relief when supper was over, and they were drinking large cups of coffee in the sitting-room.

"Well, then," said Mr. Draper, "it is settled that I take the chaplain's duties on Sunday at the Station church. It will be a good opportunity to urge the cause of the Mission and endeavour to awaken the interest of the official community."

"Oh!" said Mr. Williams quietly, "I think the officials understand the situation well enough, and are in sympathy with us as far as they are able to be. But you must remember that the policy of the British Government is one of non-interference in religious matters—and probably that is one of the reasons why Western rule has been so well tolerated in the country——"

"My dear friend!" interrupted Mr. Draper in hoarse horror, "do you really mean to tell me that you think the official element *right* in not furthering the cause of Christianity by every means in its power?"

"I certainly do not think that official power and position should be used as a lever for false conversion—which is what it would come to. We all know the native tendency to propitiate those in authority by any available means. How could we

feel sure that profession of belief was genuine when hope of preferment or advantage might lie behind it?"

"My opinion is that Christianity should come before politics," cried Mr. Draper; to which Mr. Williams wisely made no reply. Instead he asked Mrs. Draper if she had started her poultry yard again, and so brought about an eager discussion, in which every one joined but Anne, as to the best methods of inducing the Indian fowl to lay an egg that was bigger than a walnut.

"Give them a hot chota-hazri," recommended Mrs. Draper, her forefinger in the air, "I have always been privileged and blessed to an extraordinary degree over my poultry, and, God willing, I shall have a fine lot of chickens soon to carry us through the hot weather."

Good feeling, which had so nearly been disturbed, was well restored, and the party separated with great cordiality. Mr. Draper went so far as to say that he hoped he should see Anne among the congregation at the English church on Sunday—that she might possibly glean some information as to the religious needs of the country from his sermon. And of course Anne replied that she should look forward to hearing him above all things.

CHAPTER X

On Sunday morning Anne decided that she would attend the English church, though Mr. Draper's sermon was hardly the inducement. So far she had only been once to church, and that the native Christian church, while at Sika; and the excuses of a headache, important letters to write, and finally a bold refusal, had on each Sunday respectively exempted her from a repetition of such an ordeal as the native service. She had hated the dark faces with inquisitive eyes turned towards her, the drone of the voices, the untuneful music, the, to her, unintelligible language, the odour of musk and cocoanut oil, and the bald ugliness of the building that made no appeal to the senses.

Little more than a month had passed since her arrival in India, but already she felt that if the termination of her exile were not brought within measurable distance very soon, she would be unable to endure another week at the Mission House. Even Crivener with Aunt Agnes' slights, and veiled ill nature, and all the unpleasantness of a dependent position, would be preferable to this Spartan monotony. At Crivener, at least, she had led the life luxurious in the matter of material comfort, though other disadvantages were emphatic; whereas here

the food was untempting, her bed indifferent, there was no one she could talk to freely, and the days were dull without peace, for the air was always full of strain and pressure, and work was invariably considered before convenience. Shortly—Anne was bored to the limit of her patience, and had arrived at the point when definite action seemed imperative.

She would go to the English church; but first she must write and tell Dion she was going, in which case he also would be there. To be seen in church by the man who is in love with her encircles a woman with a halo of virtue, which gives her a powerful advantage. Anne had played with, and enjoyed, this situation before, though without ulterior motives. Now she meant to sit, devout and demure, in a pew beside Dion, to share with him her hymn-book—she had a voice that was seductive with the tricks of a certain system of training—to make him feel how very far she was above him, so that when she condescended to imply, as she intended doing later in the day, that she felt she could bring herself to be his wife, he might be the more fully conscious of the favour bestowed; and so remain without suspicion that she could be influenced by anything but the purest and most disinterested of passions for himself!

Oliver Wray she had not seen since their encounter in the bazaar, and subsequent drive to the Mission House. He had been closely occupied, so she gathered from the conversation at meals—occu-

pied with Nattoo, the old native who was a Christian sub rosa; with the schools; the converts; with city preaching. Mr. Williams had remarked that Wray had come back to a particularly heavy accumulation of work; and Mrs. Williams (revived now, but still unfit for much exertion) bemoaned the fact that he had scarcely taken one proper meal—save his early tea—in his quarters. This information had been supplied to her by Wray's servant, an old Hindu convert of low caste, who adored his master with the blind, selfless devotion of a dog. He complained bitterly to Mrs. Williams of the Sahib's indifference to personal comfort.

Anne had rather looked to the interesting young missionary to relieve the tedium of her time; but these days had already shown her that he was in no way to be relied on for companionship—that there was small chance of their meeting except perhaps at meals now and again in the presence of the Williams party. Insensibly the knowledge incited her to clinch matters with Devasse. Could she have counted on the distraction of beguiling from Wray his confidence and friendship, she might possibly have dallied over the business that had brought her out to India.

On the Sunday morning she wrote a note to Captain Devasse, and entrusted it to Tabitha to despatch by coolie. In spite of her "Kistarn" principles Tabitha was enchanted to be allowed a share in what, to her Eastern mind, must necessarily mean

an intrigue. The note was for a sahib—moreover one of the *regiment* sahibs!—the one who came sometimes to the bungalow now that a young and beautiful "Miss" was to be found there. Such a splendid sahib, so grand, and big, and kind. Once he had spoken to Tabitha, who happened to be lurking in the veranda when he came to call on Miss Crivener; and the convert girl had treasured in her mind every word, and look, and gesture, with an impersonal sense of pleasure. Anne she also admired with enthusiasm, admired her clothes, her appearance, her idleness, her manner so distantly gracious. And an "affair" between these two delightful beings was entirely to be understood and expected. Using elaborate precautions for secrecy she summoned a coolie; and with the air of a conspirator impressed upon him that the note was to be delivered to the sahib's bearer and no one else. When he returned with the answer she would be on the watch to receive it into her own keeping.

Anne was quite unconscious of the pleasure she afforded. She had entrusted the note to Tabitha because the rest of the English speaking household were absent on Sunday duties, and the Christian girl was the only remaining person who could understand what she said. When the answer was brought to Anne, just as she was about to start for church, she was puzzled to account for Tabitha's meaning looks and mincing gait, fraught with mystery and importance.

She read the note while the gharry—hired also with the aid of Tabitha—waited under the porch. It told her that Dion would be on the look-out for her at the church door . . . why had she not asked him to come and fetch her? . . . he saw so little of her . . . he would drive her home after church . . . he would also take her for a long drive in the afternoon if she would let him. . . .

So Anne rattled off in the unstable vehicle that would take her almost any distance for eight annas, or, roughly speaking, sixpence; and Tabitha stood on the steps, in an ecstasy of admiration and interest, to watch her heroine depart, and was deplorably careless and inattentive over her work for the rest of the morning.

Miss Crivener rather enjoyed her noisy drive than otherwise. Her spirits rose as they clattered through the bazaar, and out along the road, lined with mango and tamarind trees, that led to the English quarter. The clouds that had hung about with sulky indecision were separating now, and there were sunshine and lightness once more, yet tempered with just the sense of uncertainty that rendered the change more valuable.

As she turned in at the gate of the church compound she saw Mrs. Stapely and her mother in the porch, with Babba between them, rebellious in his best suit and gloves. Behind stood Dion, and the four were evidently in wait for her arrival. A small group of officials with their families exchanged sig-

nificant glances as Anne was greeted by the Judge's wife and Captain Devasse. The whole Station was aware that Miss Crivener and the young soldier were old friends, and the whole Station was convinced, as well, that there was a private engagement between them. This impression had protected Anne from the attentions of the unattached bachelors of Sika—she was regarded universally as the property of Devasse. Mrs. Stapely was suspected of being in the confidence of the affianced pair, and in the secret as to why the engagement was not announced. Perhaps she was not too decided in her denials when accused of withholding exciting information on the subject; for she was extravagantly interested in, and attracted by this fashionable, self-assured young woman, who represented to her a world of which she knew little or nothing—the world she imagined she saw reproduced in the society papers at the Club, and it pleased her to feel that she was assumed to be in Miss Crivener's confidence. All she desired was that if an engagement was really imminent it might be inaugurated beneath her roof. There was no doubt that Captain Devasse was deliriously in love—any one could see that! But it was far more difficult to diagnose the feelings of the young lady.

Mrs. Stapely darted forward to greet Miss Crivener almost as though she were doing hostess at a party.

"If I had only known in time that you were com-

ing to church I would have sent the carriage for you! Come and sit with us—both of you." She included Dion with a wave of her hand, "and you must both of you come back afterwards with me to breakfast!" She looked hopefully from the girl to the man; they smiled acceptance and thanked her. "We stick to late breakfast," she added, as they all moved towards the church door, "though I know it is very out of date in India now! So many people nowadays go in for breakfast at ten and tiffin at two, and of course it is very much more English, I know. But we don't like it."

They went inside, and Mrs. Stapely led the way to the Judge's pew—a front pew—parallel with that of the Magistrate, as symbolising the equality of their official positions. Babba was, with difficulty, induced to sit down, but the disturbance he made in the process was embarrassing to his companions. He knew very well that he held command of the situation; his mother could not reprove him aloud in church, or send him to bed, his grandmother could hardly give him *put-put,* so he took his hat off and put it on again several times, until it was wrested from him, whereupon he fell with a crash to the floor, dragging with him prayer-books, hymn-books, Bibles, and cushions. Then he insisted upon sitting beside Miss Crivener, who did not appreciate the attention; but as, apparently, the alternative would have been howls of expostulation, she was forced to submit. The congregation was

small, for the reason that many of the officials and their households were in camp; and also Sunday was a favourite day with the military contingent for shooting expeditions, combined with picnics, when the ladies rode or drove to join the guns at some meeting-place. But a certain number of both civil and military representatives were present, with a sprinkling of subordinates and Eurasians. The antiquated organ was plied vigorously by a young lady with yellow hair and a surprising hat.

"Isn't it a blessing," whispered Mrs. Stapely to Anne, "that old Draper couldn't come?"

Anne turned to her a face of interrogation, but at that moment, instead of Mr. Draper, with his beard and his cough, there entered, from the vestry, Oliver Wray. The congregation stood up, and Anne's heart gave a most unaccountable leap within her. She gazed at the rapt, earnest face with a curious thrill of excitement, and the whole colour of her surroundings changed. The prosaic, uninteresting congregation, the ugly brick walls, the primitive decorations, the outrageous hat of the organist faded away, and she saw nothing but the outline of a finely-shaped head, and two grey eyes that had the coldness and the mystery of frozen water in their glance.

The actual words of the service sounded meaningless and far distant; she heard only the one voice, with its cultured cadence and ring of reverence. She might have been under a spell; and now and

then she wondered vaguely what had happened to her. When Wray mounted into the pulpit he seemed to stand against a background of light, while all else was shadowed and indefinite. Anne sat and marvelled at herself. She endeavoured to argue that this was sure proof of the magnitude of her *ennui;* how desperately dull she must have been if the sight of this man—though certainly the only being who had interested her at all since she came to Sika—could work such an effect on her imagination! She knew she was listening with excitement for his first words—that she was noting his every movement; the way he stood; his manner of grasping the sides of the pulpit; how he looked about him with those peculiar light eyes. The girl raged against her own feelings, yet was utterly powerless to control them.

There was a pause without movement. Then the text echoed clear and electric through the church:—*"The Voice of one crying in the Wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight."*

Only portions of the sermon actually reached Anne's brain; she heard the beginning, then bits and sentences more or less clearly, and was conscious of their meaning. The rest seemed merely sound overwhelmed by the tumult of her own thoughts and feelings. She knew that Mr. Wray began by alluding, as he said had done the Prophet Esaias, to the ancient custom of sending forerunners to give

warning and make preparation for the progress of a King or Potentate through any country; and he drew a comparison between this custom and the lives of the various religious reformers who had arisen in the world before the Incarnation. One and all they had been voices crying in the Wilderness of sin and debasement; sometimes too feeble and mistaken to do more than penetrate beyond a certain area, sometimes so strenuous, so ardent, imbued with such elements of truth as to spread far and wide, clearing portions of The Way with a grand purpose whose influence lived for centuries. They had been pioneers—pioneers of the King of Salvation; had cleared portions of The Way according to their strength; had done their best—brave, earnest souls whose reward was sure, though the jungle of superstition and idolatry had sprung up again and choked their clearings. . . . But, however unsuccessfully, they had laboured for a great end; disheartened, weary, they had yet been fragments of the Grand Completion that was afterwards to come. The devotion and example of these men's lives had always appealed to the people among whom they had arisen. . . and presently the missionary dwelt in particular on the history of Gautama Buddha, the royal-born seeker after truth, who had renounced birth-right, home, love, sovereignty, power, to wander forth "a Voice crying in the Wilderness" five hundred years before the coming of Christ. This man's influence, in spite of

failure and discouragement, had delivered half the world for nearly ten centuries from the trammels of idolatry. . . . Wray reminded his hearers that only within a few miles of where they were gathered together Buddha had preached his first sermon, had made known the convictions that were so to stir the Indo-Aryan mind . . . the great thinker had been humble, gentle, yet grandly courageous; he had not claimed to be the only perfectly enlightened man that the world had ever seen; others, he knew, had been before him; others, he had said, would surely come after him, from time to time, to check the tide of human sin. . . . Buddha had stood forth in his day as the deliverer of a people sunk in ignorance, enslaved by the cruel oppressors, Caste and Corruption. . . , he had striven to solve the mystery of sorrow, wickedness, misfortune;—yet, in the end he had failed, Idolatry had triumphed once more. For Buddha, with all his piety, enlightenment, and love, was Man, not God—he could give neither hope nor salvation. . . . There were still vast wildernesses to be prepared and made straight for the news of the King; wildernesses in which Christian voices must herald him unceasingly . . . and the preacher now urged, with passion, how grave was the responsibility of those who had the truth yet would not follow it; how solemn was the need of their example and sympathy towards the dwellers in those wildernesses, who, so far, were not yet able to comprehend the true life.

So much remained to be done, so great must be the labour before the desert that lay at their very gates could be transformed into a garden that should blossom with the purity and peace of Christ. . . .

Anne bent forward mechanically with the rest of the congregation at the conclusion of the service. The singleness and sincerity of the man, the exaltation in his face, the fervour and magnetism of his voice had stirred her strangely; and a question, swift and painful, assailed her now with clamorous persistence: "What would he think of me if he knew?—what would he think—what would he think—" The words seemed to beat time to the march that the organist was labouring to produce from the organ.

Anne followed Mrs. Stapely down the church and into the porch, seeing no one, hearing nothing but the jerky march with its accompaniment in her own brain: "What would he think—what would he think——"

"Wait a minute," said Mrs. Stapely. "I want to ask Mr. Wray if he will come back to breakfast. Babba, run round to the other side of the church, and when the Padre-sahib comes out tell him Mamma wants to speak to him."

"No, no," objected Babba, in shrill Hindustani. "I do not wish to go." He darted away from his mother and threw his hat and gloves as far as he could into the compound. Captain Devasse looked at Miss Crivener and laughed.

"Oh! Babba!" cried Mrs. Stapely, helplessly.

An obsequious Eurasian retrieved Babba's belongings and returned them with ingratiating smiles; and Captain Devasse volunteered, unwillingly, to take Mrs. Stapely's message to the vestry door; from whence, presently, he and the missionary returned together.

Mr. Wray shook hands with the two ladies, and, after perceptible hesitation, accepted Mrs. Stapely's invitation to go back to the Judge's house to breakfast. "You must eat something somewhere," his would-be hostess had argued.

Was it her fancy, Anne wondered, or did his grey eyes rest on herself during the moment's doubt, as though she were the cause of it? No, such a notion was of course preposterous!—he had merely been considering if his work could spare him.

Eventually they drove off. Mrs. Stapely, Babba, and Anne in the Judge's carriage; Captain Devasse in his smart dog-cart, with shining pony and glittering harness, conveyed the missionary whose shabby trap followed slowly, led by the syce.

"Well, what did you think of the sermon?" enquired Mrs. Stapely of Anne; then, without waiting for a reply, she went on: "I was thinking the whole time that we ought to give a dinner-party. And then I remembered about the tomato sauce. I ought to be making it at once, and the putwa jelly too. It doesn't do to leave those things till too late in the cold weather. So you see I couldn't really

attend properly to what Mr. Wray was saying, but I've no doubt it was well worth hearing. Mr. Wray is so clever; my husband thinks a lot of him, but he says he's an extremist and will probably do something extraordinary one of these days. I think he's a little 'touched' myself! I have always said so."

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he went religious mad," remarked Mrs. Stapely's mother—"remember his eyes!"

"Oh! don't," said Anne.

"Well," continued the lady, "you know it does happen sometimes with these missionaries! There was one man—I knew him quite well myself years ago—who became a bairagi fakir, and joined the procession of priests at the great fair at Allahabad with no clothes on and all smeared with ashes! He drowned himself afterwards at the junction of the sacred rivers—the best thing he could have done, poor creature. Then there was another of them, I forget his name, who went preaching about all over India in a yellow robe with just a begging bowl and staff. I believe he was killed eventually by a tiger in the jungle."

"Poor souls!" said Anne dreamily. "'Voices crying in the Wilderness!'"

Mrs. Stapely joined in: "My husband says he doesn't wonder so much that they occasionally go out of their minds as that they ever keep sane, considering the difficult lives they lead and the awful things they believe. If you really thought, Miss

Crivener, that most of your friends and relations, not to speak of millions of other people on the earth, were going to hell, wouldn't it send you crazy?"

Anne doubted, inwardly, if the conviction would cause her any particular uneasiness, but aloud she said: "Well, I suppose it is when people really do believe it that we shut them up in lunatic asylums and say they are suffering from religious mania."

"I had an aunt," remembered Mrs. Stapely, "who went off her head just in that way (Aunt Jemima, you know, mother). She was only an aunt by marriage. Among other things she thought she was Martha—Mary and Martha in the Bible, you know—and she was shut up in a private lunatic asylum for years. She's dead now, and I and my brothers got nothing, though all her money had really been my uncle's. Wasn't it a shame? Babba, sit still, and don't kick Miss Crivener."

Babba was kicking his mother, not Miss Crivener. But now that it had been suggested to him he smote the shins of the Miss Sahib with the toes of his thick little country-made boots; so that all but Babba were relieved when the carriage drew up before the steps of the Judge's veranda.

Breakfast was a ponderous meal. It began with porridge, and tinned herrings wrapped in buttered paper; then a stew, then a curry, then eggs, and finally fruit, with the remains of the sweets left over from a dinner party last night.

Mr. Stapely was less abstracted than usual. He had done a satisfactory morning's work over his book in the absence of his family at church; and he was mildly desirous of making friends with Captain Devasse, who, according to his wife, was ultimately to marry the pretty girl from the Mission House. Griffith Stapely was nothing if not fair minded, and he could not forget that he had been exceedingly uncivil to the young soldier not so long ago on the occasion of their meeting on the Grand Trunk Road. He was also pleased to see Oliver Wray at his table; through various official channels the two had come into contact, and he entertained a respectful opinion of the missionary's character. He heard how Mr. Draper had developed a sudden cold in his head on the Sunday morning and thought it wiser to remain quiet; so that Mr. Wray, in spite of all other claims on his time, was forced to take the other's place, since Mr. Williams could not be spared from the baptismal ceremony already arranged. The Judge talked to each of his guests in turn, and though somewhat pragmatical, was worth hearing; and presently he turned again to Wray.

"By the way, Wray, I have a bone to pick with you padre-people," he said. "What have you been doing with young Ramanund—son of Rajah Rampal Singh, out at Thanesur? The old fellow drove up in state to see me this morning, attended by that objectionable old major-domo of his—I hate the fellow—and complained that he had caught his son

reading a Bible, and that the youth admitted he had got it from one of the English padres. Rampal Singh came to me because the magistrate is in camp; and he requested that the Government should forbid interference with his family in religious matters. Are you the culprit?"

Wray smiled, remembering the gaudy, arrogant figure of the Rajah lolling back in the old landau that had clattered past him that early morning at Thanesur. So poor Ramanund has been found out!

"Yes," he said quietly, "the young man asked me if the Bible had been translated so that he could read it, and, naturally, I gave him a copy. I have only seen him once—the other morning out at Thanesur—but we had a long talk. I can honestly say that I did not seek him; it was the other way round. The boy is kicking against the stagnation of the faith of his ancestors."

"Rampal Singh is a power in his own particular circle," said Mr. Stapely with rather judicial intonation. "I'm afraid Master Ramanund's kickings may only land him in disaster. The old man is very rich, he owns a big house on the river front here where he puts up for religious functions, and where he will go to die. He is, in consequence, a prime favourite with the priests. I don't think his son would have much of a chance against the lot of them."

Wray looked thoughtful; and Mrs. Stapely's

mother began to tell a long story concerning a young Hindu bearer who had turned Christian while in her service and afterwards had disappeared mysteriously.

"He was murdered, I am sure, by his relations," she concluded.

"Very probably," said the Judge.

"By jove! what brutes!" exclaimed Captain Devasse.

Anne saw grim determination settle about the missionary's jaw; and suddenly she desired desperately that he should win the soul, and rescue the body of Ramanund, the aspiring Hindu youth, who yet was nothing to her personally. In her surprise at her own sensations she barely heeded Dion who was urging her to say at what time she would prefer to start for her drive, and in which direction she would like to go.

"I suppose I may stay on here after breakfast?" he was saying in her ear. "You and I could sit and talk in the veranda if our hosts are busy. Anne—why won't you answer me?"

"I am not sure that I want to drive this afternoon," she murmured at last, with an effort. "Wouldn't to-morrow do instead?"

She shrank now from playing the part she had set herself; though she had no thought of renouncing it.

"Of course—whatever you like," said Dion, disappointment in every syllable, "but at least you will let me see you home?"

"Oh! I don't know." Anne spoke with irritation; and as Dion gazed at her in hurt amazement Mrs. Stapely rose and they all followed her into the veranda.

Oliver Wray drew himself up—braced himself mentally and bodily. He had enjoyed the little relaxation, had enjoyed his breakfast too, for he had been really hungry after the long morning's work that, for him, had begun at five o'clock; and the sight of the graceful English girl seated opposite him at the table, a breath of his old life, had been very pleasant. Now he must go back to work, and, in addition, must face the difficult problem of Ramanund's spiritual future for which in a sense he felt responsible.

"I am afraid I must be off," he said, and held out his hand to his hostess. "Thank you so much, Mrs. Stapely."

Then he turned to meet Anne's clear brown eyes; and something indescribable in their expression caused him to hesitate before he bade her good-bye.

"I—I suppose you are not going home yet, Miss Crivener?" he said tentatively, "or else, perhaps, I could drive you?"

Experienced as he was in the reading of minds and thoughts that might not find utterance, he felt instinctively that at the moment it was her wish to evade the handsome young soldier who started forward in eager reproach.

"Oh! Miss Crivener, you can't throw me over!" cried Dion.

Anne looked from one to the other—from the steadfast grey eyes of the missionary—who, she felt, was ready to help her, though he knew it not, from a grievous wrong—to the frank, wholesome face of Dion Devasse, breathlessly anxious for her decision. She was a fool,—she thought with angry impatience; she was losing control of her emotions like any hysterical schoolgirl! It was time she took herself in hand firmly, before she ruined her future, and cut off all escape from boredom and poverty.

"Oh! thank you, Mr. Wray," she said cordially, and smiled, keeping her eyes on Dion, "but I am going for a drive with Captain Devasse this afternoon—it's quite an old engagement!"

CHAPTER XI

"WHICH way shall we go?" said Captain Devasse.

They spun down the drive in his showy dog-cart, he and Anne, the pony stepping out bold and free; and he turned to wave his whip in buoyant farewell to the figures in the veranda. His spirits rose high, for was not Anne driving with him after all; had she not settled the question of her own accord, after giving him the most horrible turn by "jinking" at the breakfast table? And also he had a feeling that in some intangible manner he had scored off the parson fellow, of whom he was vaguely jealous, though he would have derided the notion had it been presented to him.

The sun shone benignly; little whiffs of cloud, light and transparent, deepened the wondrous blue of the sky. The perfect stillness of the cold season in India is one of its most subtle fascinations; and as they swung out between the gate-posts on to the broad road, Anne almost liked the country for the first time since she had landed in it.

Dion's gay contentment was infectious, and she put the disquieting remembrance of the sermon, and the penetrating eyes of the preacher and her own tiresome twinges of conscience behind her with reso-

lution. Now that she was alone with Dion, away from the curious personal influence of the missionary, her scruples seemed ridiculous. Once again her object became paramount. Before the day was over she would find herself in a position to look forward to a future that would indulge the demands of her nature—that would give her all and a great deal more than she had lost by Granny's death. She wished for society as she regarded it, for influence and success; she wanted to be of consequence in the world that she understood so thoroughly; to "count" in a certain sphere; to have that description of independence which is the privilege of those who possess wealth and good birth combined.

Anne's mental outlook cleared under the influence of the exhilarating atmosphere. Already she beheld herself in England—in London—buying her trousseau, receiving the envious congratulations of her acquaintances, arranging everything before Dion should arrive home to marry her. The wedding should be in June, in the midddle of the season. At St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, or at St. Margaret's, Westminster? . . . Agnes Crivener would be useful financially and otherwise, once she realised that her husband's niece was making a most desirable marriage. . . . But she would want to do hostess at the wedding. . . . What a bore! . . . However, people understood those situations at modern weddings and sympathised with any arrangement

that saved trouble and expense, provided the thing were well done; and Anne intended that her wedding should be well done, if "done" at all!

The girl had inherited the aristocrat's inborn horror of being forced outside her own pale—perhaps the instinct was sharpened by the knowledge that on the maternal side she actually was outside it—and her desire to regain the social independence in which she had been reared, the desire that had brought her all this distance and caused her to tolerate surroundings that otherwise she would have considered to be insupportable, now seemed to gain new energy with the rapid passage through the keen air, and from the sense of space and freedom about her.

"Well, where shall we go?" Dion repeated.

"Oh! straight along this nice, smooth road, as far as we can," she said, with satisfaction.

The broad, white track, without bend or turn, so pleasantly avenued, so easy to traverse, seemed to her symbolical of her own life's way in the future.

"It will lead us to Thanesur, I think."

"To Thanesur?" queried Anne. The name was faintly familiar.

"You heard them talking about Thanesur at breakfast—about the Rajah. Apparently the padre got the Rajah's son into trouble by giving the youth a Bible!"

"Oh! of course," said Anne; and wished he had not mentioned the padre.

"And then I think Thanesur is the place that Wray spoke of in his sermon—a rotten sermon I thought it, by the way, not a bit like the sermons one is accustomed to hear—the place where Buddha" (he pronounced it Budder) "is supposed to have preached, or some legend of that sort."

For Anne, of a sudden, the brightness seemed to leave the air. She gave a little shiver.

"We had better not go as far as that," she said, uncertainly.

"Oh! it's no distance," Dion assured her. "This pony will take us there before we can say knife! Isn't he a flyer? You can't think how ripping it is to feel one can afford good horseflesh among other things. It can be no fun being rich unless one has been poor first. Sometimes I can hardly believe that I'm almost a blooming millionaire! It didn't seem to matter so much being hard up out here, but at home it was awful. Do you remember those horrible people who used to snub me so because I was a pauper and they were afraid I was after their fat daughter? What was their nasty name—Boil—wasn't it?—no, Blayne!"

Anne laughed and felt better, and the brightness came back into the air as they fell to talking over mutual acquaintances, of London, of the various houses at which they had met their friends and danced together. They recalled little jokes and happenings, broken-off engagements, unexpected marriages, one or two scandals. In short, they gos-

sipped shamelessly, and saw nothing of the flat, peaceful country on either side of them; were blind to groves of mango and pipal trees, hamlets, wayside shrines, unfenced fields of growing crops, herds of goats, cows, buffaloes. Captain Devasse threw not even a glance to the chain of swampy lakes, thick with wild fowl, in the distance; at any other time they would instantly have claimed his recognition as a sportsman. And it was only by an accident that Anne spied the great tower further away to their left across a stretch of broken ground, for the most part uncultivated, patched with coarse grass and clumps of cactus, and irregular mounds of brick and rubbish.

"What is that?" she said, and pointed to the massive erection with its crooked, battered crown standing full in the sunlight, "a watch tower?"

Dion checked the pony. "Oh! here we are—how quickly we must have come along—that's the place. Would you like to leave the road and get close to it?"

Anne looked across the desolate waste of ruin. So it was here that the voice of Buddha had cried his great creed so long, long ago! The thought awed her mind, with quick reaction from the trivial talk she had just enjoyed; the silence, the wild loneliness, the associations of the spot aroused her wonder. Had it really happened? She must ask Mr. Wray to tell her all about it—Dion, of course, would know nothing. Then a sudden repulsion, almost a

terror of the place, overcame her. She could not go any nearer, she could not lie to this man by her side in such an environment; the memory of Oliver Wray, with his clear, stern soul, would be with her throughout, balking her in her purpose, spoiling her enterprise. Again she gazed for a lingering moment towards this relic of past ages that stood, steeped in a melancholy peace, like an aged person who has survived all ties and contemporaries and has nothing left for which to hope, or to despair. She turned to Dion and forced herself to speak.

"No, I won't go any further," she said quietly, "it would make us so late if we go over all that rough ground. Turn the pony, Dion, let us go back."

He obeyed her with reluctance. "I'll walk him a bit," he said.

"No—not yet," she spoke almost sharply—she wanted to feel that the great, silent tower was far behind her, hidden by the trees, unable to watch her, before she began her manœuvres.

"Oh! all right—just as you like," said Dion good-tempered, though secretly rather puzzled. Anne was very capricious to-day; but he loved her in every mood.

Neither of them spoke much for the next few minutes. Dion was occupied with the pony who was pulling hard, his head towards home. Anne

was preparing her words. Presently she laid her hand on his arm.

"Let him walk now," she said deliberately.

Something significant in her tone sent a thrill through his veins. He looked down at her swiftly, and pulled the pony almost on to its haunches.

"Go to the pony's head," he said to the syce, speaking very loud that his voice might not tremble.

Then, as they moved on slowly, he waited for Anne to speak, his heart drumming with excitement. In the short pause that followed the anxious "pu-ee, pu-ee" of a plover pierced the clear air and it sounded to Dion like an echo of the impatient words in his mind:—"Anne—be quick! be quick!"

"Do you remember," she said, very low, "a promise you asked me to make to you—that day among the orange trees?"

Dion caught his breath. He changed the reins from his left hand to his right.

"Yes," he said unsteadily, "do you think I am likely to forget it?"

"Well—no." Anne gave a little apologetic laugh, "but I think—perhaps—oh! Dion," reproachfully, "you might help me out!"

His free hand closed on hers with a grip that drove the reins into her fingers. He bent his head till he could see into her eyes. "Anne!" he whispered, "is it true?"

She looked away, to the side of the road, where

the plover was running and flapping and repeating her impatient call.

"I think," said Anne tremulously, "yes, I think it is true."

He kissed her.

"Oh!" she protested, almost hysterical, "mind the syce."

"Damn the syce," he said, and kissed her again.

The native's back was stolid as he marched at the pony's head with long regular strides.

"Darling!—when did you know—when did you make up your mind? You never gave me the smallest hint, you never let me know for one moment—you adorable witch!—and only this morning at breakfast I thought you were sick of me at last, and I could have cut my throat with one of Mrs. Stapely's table knives."

"I think it was at breakfast that I made up my mind," said Anne, lamely.

"But you were thinking about it for some time beforehand?—or was it quite sudden?" he persisted, with a lover's eagerness for detail.

"Oh yes," after a pause, "for some time beforehand," then, with an effort known only to herself, she added briskly, "ever since I saw you again, at the Stapely's that first day."

"Oh! Anne—I love you! I love you! How can I ever make you understand how much? Thank Heaven your mother came back to India and married old Williams, or you would never have come

out here, and might never have got to care for me! It must have all been *meant* from the beginning, mustn't it? Anne, look at me, let me see your dear eyes!"

She looked up, unflinching now, into the love and rapture that transfigured his face; but at the moment, at the back of her mind, she heard the words beating time to a jerky march: "What would he think of me if he knew? What would he think—what would he think——"

Dion seized the whip and cracked it. "Hurrah!" he cried in his exuberant happiness, and the pony started nervously, which caused the syce to turn and reproach his master with liquid melancholy eyes.

The pony's nerves were quieted, the syce's back was once more safely presented to the occupants of the dog-cart.

"Anne, when will you marry me?" demanded Dion.

"Oh! I don't know. I cannot say yet, Dion. There are so many things to think of." A reluctance seized her that any one should know, until it was unavoidable, of her engagement. She could never endure Sophia's excited interest, her mother's tears, Mrs. Stapely's curiosity, the gossip of the whole Station, or—or the congratulations of Mr. Wray and the other missionaries, until the time for her to leave Sika drew nearer; and she could hardly rush home at once, having practically just come out! At least she must wait until the New Year. "I

don't want people to know yet. Let us keep it to ourselves till after Christmas, at any rate?"

"Of course, if it is your wish, darling. But *I* should like to drive through the bazaar and all over the Station this moment crying the news! I don't know how I shall ever manage to keep it to myself, but I'll try, since you want me to. Only we really are engaged, hard and fast, all the same, whether people know it or not?" he added, with sudden apprehension.

Anne felt a spasm of impatience. Also she was mentally exhausted with the step she had taken; and Dion's very bliss caused her a curious annoyance.

"Oh! yes," she said wearily, "we are really engaged." Then she remembered that she was supposed to be in love with Dion, and added: "But it will be nice to keep the secret to ourselves for just a little while." She smiled at him, and submitted to the inevitable consequences.

Then she declared with apparent regret that they must hurry on. "I ought to get back before dark," she explained, "because I promised Sophia I would persuade my mother to keep quiet this evening; and if I am at home to read to her and fuss over her she may give up going to church. At least it is worth trying, for she is anything but well, poor soul, and won't take care of herself. Tell the syce to get up again, Dion—dear."

Unwillingly he obeyed her and gathered up the

reins. They started off at a rapid trot, and the plover was left far behind, perhaps under the impression that she had succeeded in warning the lot of them away.

"Do you think your mother will be pleased about —about us?" asked Dion.

"Well," Anne was quick to take advantage of the suggestion, "that's really one of the reasons why I should like to keep our plans quiet till after Christmas. She is so pleased to have me with her, and the shock will be great when she knows I am going away. Perhaps after all the preparations and the extra work of Christmas is over, and she has had a little rest, she will meet it better."

"You always think of other people," cried Dion. Anne did not contradict him. "But after your mother will you think of me next? Will you, sweetheart? Don't keep me waiting longer than you can help, Anne! There's nothing to wait for. I've heaps of money, we are both young, we love each other—we are free to do as we like. Tell me, do you want me to stay on in the Army or retire? Remember, I never took the profession seriously until you refused to marry me. But I could go on taking it seriously right enough now I've begun! It's got hold of me in earnest—soldiering. I wouldn't sacrifice you for it, though—if you want me to send in my papers, they're sent!"

Anne hesitated. "Dion, would you mind very much leaving India?" she said.

"Oh! Lord no—not if you come with me. We'll go anywhere you like."

"Well—I want to go back to England—to London."

"Right-o," said Dion. "Where will you have a house? Belgrave Square suit you?"

Anne laughed. A sense of excitement and pleasure shot through her being. She had a mental whiff of London in the height of the season, a nostalgia for the clamour and scurry that yet combined the perfection of devices for saving time and fatigue. It was all to be given back to her, and she would revel in it a thousand-fold more from the very fact that it had been temporarily taken from her. Dion's remark "It can be no fun being rich unless one has been poor first"—exactly described her feelings at this moment towards the change that was in store for her. Visions of the future multiplied in her brain, and by the time they reached the native city she was almost ready to persuade herself that she was falling in love with Dion. The sense of certainty, now that she had settled everything, was very pleasant; and she began to wonder why she should have been so disturbed and unhinged by Oliver Wray and his sermon. Even as she wondered an uncomfortable little qualm recurred, and she hastened to smother it.

Before they arrived at the Mission bungalow she had arranged that, though she and Dion were really engaged, Mrs. Stapely alone was to be admitted

into the secret, that they might be sure of a convenient meeting place without causing comment; that after Christmas was over, and the New Year well begun, Anne should break the news to her mother; that soon afterwards she should sail for England to be followed later in the spring by her future husband. Captain Devasse could get long leave then, and the ultimate question of rètirement, or transfer to the Home Battalion, could be discussed and decided on his arrival. Privately, Anne meant him to retire, but there was nothing to be gained by rushing matters.

As they turned into the Mission compound the perfume of the roses in Sophia's garden met Anne's senses with a reminder of the morning when she had driven through the gateway in a shabby little trap with Oliver Wray. She fought against the reminiscence fiercely. She hated to think of the missionary; she should be glad when she said good-bye to him to feel that she should never see him again. Her resentment caused her to be kinder to Dion than she had intended. There was no one in the veranda; and she let him come with her up the steps and into the empty sitting-room, let him pull the pins from her hat which he threw aside in eager impatience, let him take her in his arms, kiss her, crush her, babble incoherently of his love. Then he held her face in his hands and gazed with fervour into her eyes.

"Anne—tell me you love me—you have not said

it. I know you do or you would not marry me, but let me hear it from your lips, that I may take the words away with me to treasure till I see you again."

She waited for a moment and looked out of the door. Across the compound she saw a figure moving rapidly. It was Oliver Wray hurrying back to his quarters for a short interval between his bazaar preaching and the service at the native Christian church. He had no hat on, his head was thrown back a little as he strode along, and she saw the fine outline of his profile defined sharply against the background of Sophia's roses. She pressed closer to her lover almost as though for protection.

"Dion—I love you," she said, clearly, defiantly.

CHAPTER XII

RAMANUND, son of the Rajah of Thanesur, paced to and fro in the garden of the old fortress in moody thought.

Around him lay a tangle of shrub and creeper splashed with blossoms crimson and yellow; from every side came the rustle and twitter of squirrels and little birds, the monotonous cooing of doves and pigeons, the creak of the well-wheel, the raucous cries of the coolie whose business it was to scare parrots and mynas from the vegetable beds—cries which he emphasised at intervals by banging with a stick on an empty kerosene oil tin. Goats and kids bleated somewhere in the background, and a cow was lowing for her calf. The air was crisp, full of golden sparkle, and the sky was a polished sapphire, with here and there just a flicker of milky cloud to show that the winter rains had not been forgotten.

But Ramanund was insensible to the animation about him. He was restless and unhappy. To no one in his own home could he confide his doubts and ambitions, his craving for Western progress, for modern education; his bitter envy of other young men of his race who were sent to the great Indian colleges to be trained according to the methods of

English public schools, to learn many sports and catch the spirit of fair play, to receive the teaching that would fit them for their various positions in life, and render them just and wise in their dealings with their own people.

He thought, with jealousy, of the son of a neighbouring landowner, a boy whom Ramanund had rather despised during their childhood, though the pair had been constant companions. This youth was now actually in England—had been there for the last three years; and the few letters he had written to his friend at Thanesur were still treasured secretly by their recipient. Ramanund could not know that the native boy, writing from an English school, and smarting, perhaps in more senses than one, from unaccustomed discipline, had composed these enthusiastic accounts of his own prowess and popularity with intent to arouse the envy of his former playmate and so salve his own feelings, mental and physical, regardless of veracity. The correspondence had long ago ceased, but it had sufficed to implant in the breast of Ramanund a respect for the advantages of Western training—a respect that had increased steadily ever since.

Ramanund's desire for information, his restiveness beneath the tyranny of Caste, and certain ancient customs that revolted his common sense, however superstitiously he might observe them, had led to his seeking the interview with the English padre that early morning among the Buddhist ruins.

The consequent study in fearful concealment, which nevertheless had been betrayed, of the Hindi translation of the New Testament, had fostered the young man's yearnings and widened his outlook till his mental condition was now one of desperate discontent. The very fact of his education on Hindu lines having been so complete had prepared his mind for the spirit of investigation and unrest that beset it.

He recognised and revered the wisdom and piety contained in the early religious literature of his people, but so complicated and entangled was the teaching with the wildest allegory, so hampered with priestly tradition, so bewildering, that the original purity and purpose was hard to seize and hold; and his mind craved for simpler guidance—for more direct and tender help.

The helplessness of his position was annoyingly apparent to him. The manner of life that was lived within the walls of his home—a building half palace, half hovel—had gone on without change for many generations, save that it was no longer necessary to be prepared against sudden attacks from hostile neighbours, or raids by wandering robber tribes. For this immunity the Rajah himself admitted (with reluctance) the British Government was to be thanked; but, on the other hand, he considered that the odious rule had brought disadvantages that far outweighed the gain. For example, it was not safe, nowadays, to put an end to unwelcome female offspring, to poison an enemy by ordinary means—

arsenic, powdered glass, the chopped whiskers of a tiger, and so on; and to strangle, or brick up alive in the wall, an erring wife was almost impossible. Under British jurisdiction the most troublesome precautions were necessary if an obstacle to ambition, inheritance, or pleasure had to be removed, an offender adequately punished, or a wrong revenged. Rampal Singh was a reviler of all things Western with the exception of such objects as mechanical toys, musical boxes, chandeliers, mirrors, and carriages, the possession of which filled him with a childish pride. At the time of the Mutiny the family had been covertly disloyal; and the Thanesur estate had escaped confiscation and disgrace only by the most cunning and elaborate artifice.

This morning the Rajah, half stupefied with opium, reclined among dingy pillows in a bare little chamber high up in the fort walls. His couch was a common native bedstead—four low wooden posts laced together with coarse string. The walls of the room were painted with crude representations of men and animals, scenes from the lives of the gods; but with the exception of the bedstead and pillows, a dirty silver hookah of beautiful design, and a brass drinking vessel chased and polished, furniture or ornament there was none.

Rampal Singh watched, with glazed eyes, his only son wander in the garden below; and he chewed pân, an ingredient of betel-nut, lime, and spices, till his loose mouth ran red. The narrow open door-

way led on to a carved balcony that was sheltered by a dilapidated piece of thatch, and squatting on the lintel was the chief servant, or overseer of the household, who also gazed with interest at the restless figure.

Krishna, the servant, was a crab-like old person, with greed and cunning stamped on every wrinkle of his malignant countenance, and in every gesture of his shrivelled little hands. He was of even higher caste than his master, for a Brahmin may occupy certain lowly positions and yet retain the prestige of his birth—"He may be priest or prince, scholar, soldier, or beggar, but he is first a Brahmin."

The Rajah was aged and feeble before his time from the effects of opium, self-indulgence, and excess; and Krishna acted as his vizier, private secretary, and general confidential factotum. This situation was worth a thousand times more than the old servant's salary, which was seldom paid and never demanded.

"The young lord is surely bewitched," he said, craning his neck the better to see over the balcony. "Who can say what is in his mind? Maybe there was an evil spell written in the book by the pig of an English padre who gave it to him. Again last night he did read it—far into the night. But now is it safely burned, the unclean book—for did I not discover it, after long search, but an hour back, in his private room hid beneath the hearth-stone! And I took it upon me to destroy the accursed thing by

fire. Now," he added hopefully, "matters may mend."

It was Krishna, always alert and inquisitive, who had suspected that something unusual was holding the thoughts and occupying the time of Ramanund. He had therefore spied upon the unlucky young man when deep in the pages of the Hindi Testament, had watched his movements, questioned his attendants, noted where he laid the book, and pounced upon it, like a cat on a mouse, to examine it the moment he saw his opportunity.

Then he carried to his master the information that the heir to Thanesur was studying the faith of the Christians; and, since, he had not ceased to impress on the Rajah the fatal results that might ensue should the "padre people" obtain an influence over Ramanund. The object of the missionaries, he declared, was to defile the homes of the "twice-born," to raise into importance the scum of the earth, whose very shadow was pollution, to destroy caste, and put an end to all custom and decency; "besides desiring to squeeze money from the wealthy, as is the habit of all priests of whatever faith," he concluded captiously.

Incidentally, it would not suit Krishna at all, apart from his genuine horror of such a calamity, for Ramanund to imbibe the teachings of Christianity. It would probably lead him to interfere over the tenants and their taxes; perhaps he would want his father to build a hospital, or waste money that oth-

erwise might go into Krishna's pocket, over some silly English scheme for improving the condition of the peasants.

Therefore, owing to Krishna's interference, Ramanund had been accused of having an English Bible in his possession, and was induced to confess who gave it to him; the immediate result being the Rajah's visit to Stapely-sahib, the Judge, on the Sunday morning a few days back. Since the English did not fear their priests—(what a scandalous state of affairs!)—the Government could be relied on to support the Rajah in suppressing any religious interference with his household.

But Ramanund had refused to part with the book; had also refused to refrain from reading it! and Krishna felt it to be his duty to take the matter into his own hands and destroy the volume, seeing that the Rajah was too dilatory to act himself with any decision.

"In a little while," continued Krishna, with a malicious chuckle, "will he repair to his room to read the book! Then, when he finds it not, will he obtain audience of Thee, Great One, and plain words will have to be spoken. Remember, 'An old man's teaching sets the world straight.'"

The Rajah spat pân juice against the wall. "Let him come, and I will speak!" he said thickly.

"In the old days," observed the servant, "it would have been easy to put a stop to this madness. Wah! it is enough to arouse the wrath of all the

gods and bring misfortune upon us all. Truly, 'Great men have troubles which little men escape.'"

"We will stop it," said Rampal Singh in dull determination.

"Without doubt, your Highness! See," Krishna pointed down into the garden, "it is even as I said, the young lord has gone in the direction of his own quarters. It is a pity," he added reflectively, "that his wife bears him no children. Who is to inherit the land? Only the child of thine honour's half-brother who is deformed and without sense. Time passes! 'Only know that posterity is thine when a grandson plays at the gate!'"

This was not the first time that the wily Krishna had reminded his master of the lack of legitimate heirs at Thanesur. There was a petty chief in a district not far distant who was anxious for an alliance with the house of Rampal Singh. If a marriage between the families could be brought about, it might mean a considerable addition to Krishna's savings.

"Maybe a new wife would clear the madness from the brain of Ramanund!" he suggested with a grin; and he shuffled off to the curtain that hung in the entrance, to look and listen for the coming of his master's son.

Krishna was right. The young man had gone to his quarters to exhume the proscribed volume from beneath the hearthstone, where he imagined it to be safely secreted. The book interested him pro-

foundly. He burned to discuss it with his friend the English priest, to draw the latter's attention to the similarity of its ethics with the old spirit of his own Scriptures, to ask a thousand questions, to argue, to criticise. The words he had read remained in his mind. Involuntarily he was stirred and affected by the spiritual purity of the teaching, by the tenderness and personality of the Teacher. Ever since he had dipped into the book he had felt unwilling to lay it down; and now he hastened through the courtyard, and up a dangerous little winding staircase, to his own room.

He had lately chosen this retreat because it was well away from the women's apartments where his little girl-wife with putty-coloured skin and large frightened eyes dwelt under the iron rule of Rampal Singh's first wife, who yet was not Ramanund's mother. The latter had died in giving him birth, owing to utter mismanagement, and the most ignorant of practices and superstitious observance. Though other ladies of various status and attractions shared the zenana with her, the old Rani reigned paramount among them all; and Ramanund's wife, individually, was of little consequence. She was too young and ignorant, and also ashamed of having borne no children, to assert herself at all; and in the presence of her husband she became a cowering, silent little mouse, unable from sheer nervousness to make anything of what charms she did possess, or to attempt to win his interest.

He held her in contempt, almost he disliked her. To him she seemed ugly and stupid, and he was with her as seldom as etiquette would permit. Already he tired of women, accustomed to them as he had been from his boyhood. Even the bright-eyed, vivacious Kashmeri girl, imported with much pains and some inconvenience by Krishna into the establishment, failed to entertain him after the first week of her arrival. And especially now was there little room in his mind for zenana matters. Ramanund could think of nothing but this strange book that the padre had given him, and he pondered continually as to how best he could contrive another meeting with the Englishman without the Rajah's knowledge.

He entered the sanctum in eager hurry. It differed subtly from that of his father, for it was pervaded by an atmosphere of cleanliness and order. A highly coloured oleograph of the late Queen-Empress hung on the wall in somewhat ludicrous contrast with a scarlet painting, or rather poster, on flimsy paper, of Lachmi, the goddess of good fortune, with her attendant elephants pouring water over her from a jar held aloft in their trunks. Native-fashion, the room was bare of furniture, save for a pile of pillows, a few priceless rugs on the floor, an inlaid pân-box, and an illuminated manuscript on a carved stand. The manuscript was a rare copy of the Bhagavad-gita, those ancient philosophical discussions which represent the true stand-

point of the early Oriental thinkers towards religious problems; the reasonings of great minds that were free from the hindrance of ritual and priestcraft, but whose teachings, alas! fell, with the ages, into the pit of idolatry.

Ramanund knelt down by the wide hearth and fumbled beneath the stone that, last night, he had loosened in order to conceal his book.

Then, presently, he stood up. Fury was in his eyes. His slender brown hands were clenched; his white teeth bit into his lower lip. All the rage and hate, and vengefulness that lies in the nature of every human being—that Ramanund had never been schooled, as is an English boy, to attempt to control or eradicate, seemed concentrated in his face. Involuntarily he turned to the grotesque presentation of the goddess of luck, as though invoking her aid; and with an evil sense of strength and encouragement he threw his arms high above his head, and brought his clenched hands down to his sides violently; then turned and strode from the room.

In a few moments Krishna, listening at the entrance to the Rajah's chamber, heard quick, angry footsteps mounting the steep stair. The old man turned back into the narrow room.

"He comes!" he announced, with spiteful anticipation; and drew aside the heavy curtain to admit his master's son.

Ramanund brushed past him, and stood before

the torpid figure of his father. The boy was quivering with emotion. Twice the words failed to come as he tried to speak.

"What does this mean?" Rampal Singh asked the question with slow annoyance. "Art thou mad?"

"Yea!—maybe I am mad—mad with anger!" stuttered Ramanund, "for have I not been robbed?"

"Wah!" returned the Rajah with contempt, and spat more pân juice on the wall and floor.

Ramanund turned furiously to the old servant. "Thou art the thief!" he cried—and there followed a stream of the choicest invective known to the Hindu tongue.

A native can seldom contain his indignation under abuse; and Krishna at once began to chatter like an angry parrot. The two voices rose high, till the Rajah at last heaved his ponderous form from among the pillows and sat upright.

"Silence!" he ordered; and the combatants turned to him simultaneously with their grievances. Ramanund's book had been stolen by Krishna. Krishna had been insulted beyond all pardon by Ramanund. "Be silent!" repeated Rampal Singh; and this time hē was obeyed.

He slipped a fresh morsel of pân into his mouth, and looked from his servant to his son.

"It is truth," he said to the latter, "that Krishna hath removed thē accursed book from its hiding-

place. And now is it burned—which is well, for such reading is forbidden by thy faith, and it is pollution even but to think on its words."

"Surely——" began Ramanund in indignation.

The Rajah held up his hand. "Hast thou been aught to me but a trouble—a devil on the breast?" he interrupted wearily. "Where are thy sons—who will come after thee? Turn thy heart from foolishness and give thy mind over to duty as becomes the son of a pious father. Take another wife, and raise up an inheritor of the land. Propitiate the priests; observe the ceremonies of thy faith; offend not the gods; and eschew evil opinions. Why—what art thou but a youth, with a youth's ignorance and foolish pride? What dost thou know? 'In August was the jackal born, and in September saw he a flood and said, Never in my life have I seen such a flood!' So is it with thee. Remember that!" He paused for a moment, breathing heavily, then added, as something that had just occurred to him: "Remember also that if such waywardness continue, punishment will surely follow."

He shut his eyes, and when Ramanund began a voluble defence he waved him away. The Rajah was weary of the scene; he wished to doze and smoke in peace. The book was safely destroyed. Ramanund had been warned. There was nothing to be gained by further parley; and he sank back among his pillows.

When the culprit, in sulky resentment, had departed, Krishna squatted down on his heels beside his master's couch.

"Maybe that matter is finished, maybe it is not," he observed sententiously; "the warning will perhaps roll from his mind as a drop will roll from the surface of a greasy jar. But should trouble continue, the source of the mischief must be discovered and stemmed. It is likely that the giver of the book and, therefore, the real cause of the evil, is the young padre with the thin face and eyes like a mountain lake without sunshine. The rest of the English priest-folk are harmless enough, and Ramanund would listen to none of them. Have I not heard them all proclaiming their gods and their faith? But the young man with the deep eyes can speak with words that would stir the heart of the foolish, because he is learned in the wisdom of our people, which the rest of his kind are not. Also he is fair-minded, and wily of speech and brain. There are certain of the priests and the people who hate the padre-log and their lying tongues with a deadly hatred. It would be easy enough——" he paused, significantly, waiting for a word of acquiescence and understanding from the Rajah; but the only reply he received was a violent snore. Krishna spat over the parapet of the balcony with accuracy and disgust.

Ramanund went out from his father's presence in dumb anger. He could guess at the horrors that

might await him should he defy tradition and attempt to satisfy the vague yearnings that possessed him,—the desire for change, for something wider, more elevating than the offering of flowers and eatables and money to the gods, the superstitious reverence for myth and fable, the propitiation of the priests, the everlasting ceremonial and observance that had no effect on daily life and character,—that led to no rectitude of conduct.

He knew that his father was held in high favour and esteem by the priests as a devout, orthodox (and wealthy) Hindu—himself part of the divine as a high-caste Brahmin—believing whatever they told him, giving whatever they demanded in the name of the gods. For the mind of Rampal Singh was steeped in superstition; omens, dreams, charms, spells, evil spirits were a direct and perpetual reality to him, and he carried out no undertaking that was not sanctioned by some lucky token. Yes; the Rajah of Thanesur was accounted a very religious being in the opinion of the priests and the people, and yet Ramanund, his son, knew well that he was vicious, greedy, selfish, callous to suffering, sensual and cruel;—that he was charitable only because he hoped to reap benefit thereby, or protect himself from misfortune.

As Ramanund went slowly down the staircase he recalled his own early boyhood, and contemplated his present manner of living with shame and bitterness. He asked himself—did he ever consider

others? Was his life a true, clēan life such as the English padre had spoken of,—such as he had read of in the book that had been taken from him so unfairly?

He hastened to his own room and threw himself on the floor in a frenzy of disgust and despair. Unless he could save himself he must become just such another as his father. He loathed his own person. He hated his own existence. His spirit beat wildly against the barriers that held it prisoner; his body trembled in a helpless passion of revolt.

Until long past midday he lay there. Food was brought to him, savoury vegetable curry, perfectly cooked rice, with hot, spiced cakes, and melted butter, dainty sweetmeats, oranges, pomegranates, custard apples, guavas. But all remained on the trays untouched. Ramanund gazed with sombre eyes and burning heart out of his little window in the direction of Sika, where dwelt the one being who, he felt, could help him to see his way clearly. A plan was evolving slowly in his mind. The recent interview with his father had convinced him that matters had reached a climax. He must either strike out for himself and study and live as he pleased, risking banishment, persecution, even perhaps torture or death, or else sink back into the old, sensuous, self-indulgent existence; pass his days as his ancestors had passed their days before him, marry another wife,—perhaps three more wives, since his religion permitted in the hope of obtaining a legiti-

mate heir; eat, sleep, idle and gamble; go into Sika to bathe and worship and make an imposing display of wealth and importance. . . .

At last, when the afternoon sun had begun to wane, Ramanund rose and went out. Even as he passed through the courtyard he knew, with the subtle instinct of the native, that his movements were remarked; and he noted that the shabby sentry at the gates, after saluting him with profound respect, peered after him for a moment, and then hailed someone softly from above. Presently, as the young man strolled with assumed indifference along the edge of the crops that reached almost to the fort walls, he heard his name called; and he turned in irritable resignation to see three or four youths of about his own age, idle hangers-on of the establishment, more or less related to the family, emerging from the gates. They shouted to him to wait for them, and soon joined him, chattering, laughing, scuffling in their large, loose shoes, their draperies flapping, their slender brown hands gesticulating rapidly;—a gay, irresponsible group sent forth by Krishna in the Rajah's name to accompany the young lord in his walk, since it was unseemly that he should go forth to eat the air without escort—indeed, to walk at all was eccentric and undignified for one in his position!

The young men had obeyed in good-natured protest, though every one knew that Ramanund preferred to be alone. Did he not ride by himself and

refuse to go with the rest of them in the carriages? Did he not discourage company in his new quarters and prefer to sit, or wander in the garden alone? True, he seldom went outside the gates on foot, but since he now had a fancy for so doing it was rather hard that other people should be put to inconvenience, and made to walk over rough ground, and tire their limbs and hurt their feet! However, Krishna had uprooted them from a noisy game of Pachisi and told them it was the Rajah's will, so there was no help for it; only Ramanund must be induced to return as soon as possible.

To their relief Ramanund seemed to have no wish to go far. He said he merely desired to eat the air for a short time, and they would just walk as far as the commencement of the ruins and back again. So they moved on, an irregular little procession, Ramanund in front; the rest straggled behind him, for natives seldom walk abreast, pushing one another in play, turning constantly to laugh and talk, flourishing the English walking-sticks they had all brought with them, a monkey-like band, yet picturesque with their highly coloured clothes, young faces, and supple figures.

Their leader walked in silence. Outwardly he gave no sign of his resentment of their company. It was not their intention, he knew, to intrude on him; but it was the intention evidently of his father and Krishna to allow him no freedom beyond the gates of the fort walls. It had been in his mind

when he left the fort to hail the first ekka he should see, that he might get into Sika to interview the English padre. Failing an ekka, he had meant to walk. Englishmen walked, so why not he? They walked ten, twelve, fifteen miles at a stretch, and thought nothing of it! He had seen the officials early in the mornings walking through the fields and villages, speaking with the people, inspecting, investigating on their way from one halting place to the next camp. But now, of course, it was impossible for him to make any attempt to reach the city; and he foresaw endless espionage in the future.

All the same, he resolved to have his own way. Nothing should prevent him; and as he stood on the outskirts of the ruined sites, and looked across at the spot where he had spoken with the white priest, he vowed that he would see him before another dawn should break.

Then he turned homewards; and they all made a noisy, laborious, good-tempered progress back to the fort gates.

CHAPTER XIII

At the hour when Ramanund and his undesired companions were returning to the fort, Oliver Wray came out of his little bungalow dressed in flannels, a tennis racquet under his arm.

It was some days since he had taken the service at the English church and breakfasted with the Stapelys, and these had been days of curious mental disquietude for the missionary. So far, from the time of his arrival in India, five years back, his mind had held nothing but an intense fervour for his work; his thoughts had circled about a single object only—*i.e.*, how best to fulfil his duty. If he had ever felt worried or perplexed it was solely on account of some apparent failure to make his message clear to the people; his tribulations had been connected entirely with his work. Nothing else had harassed him, because there was nothing else for which he cared, absorbed and possessed as he was with his mission—the fight against idolatry.

Little rubs there had been, perhaps, with Mr. Williams or the Drapers; and Sophia, kind creature, was occasionally exasperating. Now and then he had been laid low with fever and found himself, to his extreme vexation, unable to leave his bed for a few days. At times he had felt a desperate impa-

tience at the slowness of the results of proselytism, and his courage and belief had been sorely tried; many bitter battles of the spirit had been fought to a finish in the silence of the bare, whitewashed rooms of his tiny bungalow.

Now the vague sense of trouble that had awoke and gnawed within him ever since Anne Crivener had stood before him in the Stapelys' veranda, and refused his aid so deliberately, was something quite different and apart from all former vexations. It was personal and human. He kept recalling the look in her eyes, wondering what manner of doubt it could be that had troubled her soul? He was assailed by an intense desire to enter into her thoughts and feelings, to help her, to induce her to unburden her mind; it was pain to him to imagine that perhaps she was in some difficulty, spiritual or worldly, and was suffering in silence for want of sympathy and advice.

But he had seen little of her or of the Williams family for the past few days. Mrs. Williams, he knew, was ailing, and he supposed that Miss Crivener was in close attendance on her mother, since Sophia and the old missionary were much occupied with Christmas preparations. Wray felt glad that the good, gentle lady should have the comfort and pleasure of her daughter's presence, who probably was an admirable nurse. He thought, involuntarily, of Anne's quiet movements, the fragrance of her person, her cool, firm hands, the magic of her

voice. Once or twice he had seen her go out riding or driving with her old friend Captain Devasse, who, of course, wished to marry her. That was palpable! Did she find the situation difficult? Was that the trouble? He could not picture her as the wife of an individual who was a materialist to his heart-strings, simple to primitiveness in his ideas, utterly unable to rise above a certain level of thought and conduct. Wray had observed Dion with interest that morning at the Judge's house, and, while he imagined that he gave the soldier every due for his undeniable honesty and good breeding, in reality he was severe in his judgment. He was filled with an unaccountable sense of distaste and impatience to think that such an ordinary young man should consider himself suitable as a husband for this exceptional girl, with her fastidious air, her delicate beauty, and her charm of manner. He hoped sincerely that life would be kind to her, that she might escape suffering, be happy, contented, lack nothing that her dainty nature needed; and at the back of the hope there hovered still the suspicion, almost the certainty, that at present she was *not* altogether happy.

Anne was in his mind, vividly, as he left the bungalow on his way to play tennis with the native youths of the Government College; and to see her standing on the steps of the Mission House veranda seemed only natural. He went out of his route that he might speak to her.

She was glad to see him. "Where are you going?" she asked; and her glance absorbed rapidly the pleasing effect of the clothes he wore—clothes that gave an added masculinity to his appearance, and so met with Anne's very decided approval.

"Tennis," he answered, with a wave of his racquet; "tennis with the young men of the Government College."

"Oh! Do *they* play?" Her tone was incredulous.

"Certainly, and are very hard to beat. Cricket, too, and plenty of other games. It does wonders for them morally and physically, and the next generation will feel the benefit even more of such an innovation. Just as the girls of the present day in England, owing to the same departure, are growing stronger, taller, more natural, more healthy than their grandmothers ever did."

"I suppose I am an old-fashioned person," said Anne, rather egoistically. "I only ride and play croquet. I have never gone in for violent games and exercise; I think it makes women rough, very often ugly!"

"Perhaps so," he answered with an hesitation that was significant; for as he looked into Anne's brown eyes and noted the exquisite texture of her skin, the brilliance of her hair, and the feminine dignity of her pose and figure, he could hardly fancy her scuffling at hockey in thick boots and a short skirt, or pounding about a tennis court with a wild

appearance and a red face. Yes, he felt glad she did none of these things!

"How is Mrs. Williams to-day?" he asked hastily, to check this unaccustomed trend of thought.

"Rather better; she is not in bed, and she goes up and down, and is worrying herself dreadfully about all the Christmas work—the decoration of the church, and the sweetmeats for the school children, and the presents sent by subscribers from England for the converts, and so on. It's astonishing how much there seems to do, and not only here, but out in the district, too. Mr. Williams and Sophia have gone off this morning to some village where there are a lot of Christians, but no native pastor at present. They were going to organise some sort of festivity for the people to remind them of the importance of Christmas time. They won't be back till to-morrow morning."

"Oh!" said Wray doubtfully. "I thought the Drapers were going to see to that."

"The Drapers find the cold too intense in camp at night this time of year," said Anne, looking at him with a mischievous smile; "it makes them cough, and, of course, health must be the first consideration with people whose lives mean so much to the soul of the heathen!"

He did not respond. She knew she had wounded him with her little dart, and suddenly she regretted that she had shot it.

"I hope you will enjoy your game," she added genially, to turn his attention. "India seems the very place for tennis—no wind, and such good grass, and plenty of boys to pick up the balls."

She thought she should like to see him play. He played well, she felt sure, and without awkwardness or strain.

Instead of hurrying off, as she expected he would do, he lingered a little, answered her remarks about tennis, and asked if she was going out that afternoon.

"No; I don't like to leave my mother. I am on duty till Sophia and my step-father come back to-morrow. One of them must have stayed if I had not been here, and that would have thrown double work on to the other. You see what a lot I am learning!"

"Can I do anything to help you or Mrs. Williams?" he asked eagerly. "Let me know if you want me, won't you? I am coming straight back after tennis, and I shan't be long away."

"I will let you know, certainly," said Anne.

Then, as she watched him walk to the compound gate, she realised that their relations towards one another seemed in some subtle manner to be changed. He was more on her own level, more human, less impenetrable, or was it the effect of those well-cut tennis flannels and that worldly straw hat? She laughed. Then the laughter faded from her face, and her eyes grew wistful. She was won-

dering if, after all, he would condemn her as mercilessly as she had imagined he would if he knew her true position. No; he might not condemn, he might even understand and excuse; but worse, far worse than condemnation, she knew he would *despise* her utterly!

She shivered, and turned back quickly into the bungalow as though to escape the thought.

Mrs. Williams was sitting on the stiff little bamboo couch, almost buried beneath a mixed collection of articles that had all been sent out from England by various well-meaning people interested in foreign missions. Few of the things were of much practical value.

"What is the use," complained Mrs. Williams querulously, "of sending pinafores for the children? There are thirty-two pinafores here!" She looked very worn and fragile, and her voice was thin and weak.

"Well, according to our ideas, I suppose it is better to wear a pinafore than nothing at all," remarked Anne; and she laughed aloud at the vision that arose in her mind of little brown bazaar children with lemon-shaped stomachs, and frog-like limbs, running about in "pinnies" (and nothing else) trimmed with torchon lace and embroidery.

"And here are merino frocks and little sailor suits," went on Mrs. Williams, too much engrossed with her grievance to notice Anne's hilarity; "how I wish people would club together and pay for more

helpers, or send us the money instead of this sort of thing."

"Sell them all," suggested Anne.

"Well, of course, we might; but we generally give them to poor Eurasians who want them very badly for their children. And some of our native Christians do dress in European clothes, though I don't approve of it, neither does Mr. Williams, and we would rather not encourage it. Now here's a box of toys—those will be nice for the Christmas trees, but scrap-books are of no use. Natives can never understand pictures, and nearly always look at them upside down."

She fingered a pile of albums, the pages of which were mostly composed of glazed calico covered with old Christmas cards of every shape and size.

"I shouldn't think it mattered which way any one looked at those!" said Anne, with derision.

"Oh! dear, now I have lost my list!" cried Mrs. Williams fretfully.

She was very tired. All day she had been counting, selecting, making lists, giving directions. Bible women and catechists, mostly intelligent half-castes, and a few of the more advanced native Christians, had been in and out since early morning, asking questions, expecting first attention for their respective departments, sometimes coming perilously near to noisy disagreement with each other, which meant the exercise of infinite tact, patience, and judgment on the part of the missionary's wife. Things had

to be doled out to them, instructions given, and leisure or quiet there had been none since Sophia and her father had driven off on other duties in the old buggy (a vehicle purchased third-hand at the time of Mr. Williams' first marriage).

Tabitha's excitement over "Kistmas" rendered her perfectly useless. She ran from one room to the other, gave wrong messages, tumbled over boxes and parcels, and did no work at all. Anne helped spasmodically without the least interest. It seemed to her that this expenditure of time, trouble, and strain was out of all proportion to the objects on which it was lavished. What could it matter if some wretched little detail went wrong, if one of these eager, important *attachés* to the Mission made a mistake, or forgot to carry out instructions about toys and sweets, or the mustering of children at a particular moment? Enough attention and brain-work was devoted alone to the question of the little procession of orphan children, members of Sophia's particular class, who were to march from the school to the church on Christmas morning, as though the fate of the Empire depended on its success.

"Here is the list," said Anne; and drew the piece of paper from beneath a pile of pocket handkerchiefs.

While her mother checked it with a pencil, whispering its items, Anne yawned and felt herself to be really virtuous. She had refused to ride with Dion that afternoon on account of Mrs. Williams, though

she longed for a gallop on his new Arab, or rather *her* Arab, for the pony was a secret present to her from her lover, and was to follow her home with him in the spring; a perfect creature, selected with the greatest care through the best known dealer in Bombay, at a price that gave Anne a pleasant glow of satisfaction. Such a large sum of money, and yet it meant nothing to her future husband!

Dion was behaving fairly well, but the restraint he put upon himself when in public with his *fiancée* rendered him all the more demonstrative at the times when they found themselves alone together. Anne endured his transports with a calm passivity that he mistook for reserve, and admired and respected; though sometimes he could have wished that she would "let herself go." Still, he told himself, Anne was not "that sort." She had been taught to conceal her feelings, and he adored her tranquil self-possession and delicate dignity, because it enhanced for him the value of the confession she had made of her willingness to be his wife. Each day that he did not see her he wrote her long letters, and posted them to evade notice that delivery by messenger would have attracted. One of these letters lay on Anne's dressing-table at this moment—unopened.

Suddenly Mrs. Williams dropped her hands to her sides. "Oh!" she said, "Anne! I am so tired."

The complaint was spontaneous—the poor woman hardly knew that she had uttered it. Anne swept

parcels, pinafores, suits, handkerchiefs, scrap-books aside without ceremony.

"You have done quite enough," she said, "and now you must have some tea and a rest."

"Yes. I should like some tea, but these things must be finished to-night. I really couldn't rest till they are off my mind—and then there is the Mission dinner on Christmas Day to be considered. All the members of the Mission who are in the Station are to dine together, and we are having the meal here. Our house is the most suitable, and John is the senior missionary."

"Tch!" said Anne impatiently, "you aren't fit for it."

"I will take a long rest afterwards, my dear; but one must do one's duty, and sometimes I think I am not half thankful enough for all the years of good health that have been mine. Why, until this winter I have never felt actually ill, only tired now and then; and how few people can say that! Don't try to stop me working now, dear; I promise I will rest afterwards."

Anne saw that interference would be useless. She sent Tabitha to order tea, and herself superintended the making of it, with the result that Mrs. Williams was presently refreshed by a really good cup of tea instead of the dull-looking liquid usually served by the table servant.

The evening wore on, and only when supper was ready did Mrs. Williams cease her labours. Anne

was tired, too, by that time, and mother and daughter sat down to the table in weary silence. Mrs. Williams ate little, and afterwards, to Anne's relief, consented to go to bed comparatively early.

"I am sorry I am so stupid to-night," she said, in pathetic apology, "and I have been so looking forward to our evening alone together."

"Yes, so had I," returned Anne untruthfully, and guided her mother with skill towards the bedroom door, "but really I couldn't have talked either to-night, and the best thing we can both do is to go to bed. Can I help you in any way?"

Mrs. Williams did not answer. She kissed Anne with a wistful smile of thanks; but the girl, in her heart, knew perfectly well that her mother hoped she might offer to stay with her while she undressed, but that she was far too diffident to voice the request. Anne ignored the mute appeal; she considered she had sacrificed her own inclinations quite enough for one day, and she was impatient to be alone and free.

How thankful she felt, when at last she entered her own room, that soon she would be away from this cramped, uncongenial manner of life! She was paying a high price for her future, but, of course, it was worth it, and she could hardly have secured it in any other way. She turned up the lamp and took off her dress; now her sleepiness had left her, and for some time she dawdled over various toilet matters before she finally undressed and loosened

her hair. Then, wrapped in a warm dressing gown, she opened Dion's letter and glanced through it with a smile of tolerant amusement. It was just the same as usual—protestations, adulation, raptures.

She tossed it on the table, and asked herself—had she been in love with the writer, would such a letter have made her pulses leap? Would she have kissed the writing, slept with the precious document under her pillow, read it again the moment she awoke? Could any man touch her heart and life in this wise? Had she, perhaps, missed something very sweet?

Restlessly she rose and drew aside the flimsy curtain that hung before her window. Across the compound she could see a light twinkling from Mr. Wray's little bungalow. She leaned her head against the pane and wondered if Mr. Wray had ever been in love, or if, like herself, he had escaped, or been denied, this wonderful experience that had been lauded and lamented, blessed and cursed, written and sung of from time immemorial.

Again she caught herself picturing him as a lover, just as she had done that morning in the bazaar; but this time she neither reproached nor checked her thoughts, and she even tried to imagine what he would have said in such a letter as lay on her dressing-table now! Then she laughed. It was inconceivable that Oliver Wray could write passionate love-letters under any circumstances! He was a frigid, austere ascetic, with passion to spare for

nothing but religion and his work. She remembered his eyes. How cold they were! And yet, when Mrs. Stapely's mother had talked of madness she had said, "Think of his eyes!" Perhaps, with the law of polarity, the very restraint of his nature might cause emotion to burn the more fiercely if ever it was really kindled.

Anne all at once felt angry with him. True, he had been more human, more friendly, to her this afternoon than she had yet known him to be. But to-morrow he would probably look at her as if he did not see her at all. It was just as likely that she would encounter that curious, rapt expression of his that stirred up such unusual feelings within her. She would like to know how she appeared to him—what he thought of her, if he thought of her at all, which doubtless he did not!

She left the window with abrupt impatience. She would think of the man no more. He bored her. She hated him. She wished she had never seen him. It was all too silly and tiresome . . . What was too silly and tiresome? She stood still in the middle of the room as though listening for an answer, and suddenly tears came into her eyes.

Anne felt alarmed. She decided that she was over-tired. The long day, devoted to Mrs. Williams and Mission matters, had been too much for her nerves. Without delay she would go to bed and sleep.

But at the last moment she looked out again, and

this time her attention was caught by the twinkle of a lantern that moved quickly across the compound. It stopped in front of the small bungalow and seemed to waver to and fro. Then it mounted the steps. A door opened, showing a square of light against which, for an instant, two figures were outlined. Anne recognised the silhouette of the padre's head and shoulders; the visitor, apparently, was a native, with an untidy turban and a shapelessness of form due to a blanket, or some such drapery, wrapped shawl-wise about the arms and body. Probably an exacting Christian come to disturb him, thought Anne, with impatience. She knew that his time and attention were at the disposal of any of these wretched people who chose to claim them, while if Anne Crivener wished to talk to him he would have but little leisure to spare for her!

The figures disappeared into the bungalow, and the door was closed. Anne adjusted her curtains and went to bed, wakeful, discontented, mystified by her own unrest, annoyed with herself, with Dion, with Wray, and the entire Williams ménage. She laughed, at last, at the unreasonableness of her mood, for surely nobody had less cause for vexation than herself. Her future was not only assured, but positively brilliant . . . everything lay before her that the heart of woman could wish—it was simply that the long, weary day in her mother's

company, culminating with an exceedingly uninteresting supper, had put her out, body and mind. She must really make an effort to control her irritation, since there still remained some weeks, at least, to live through before she could leave it all behind her. . . .

She fell into a doze; then sound asleep. And when, some three hours later, she awoke, it was from a distressing dream. She was lost among the ruins of Thanesur; she was wandering in helpless fear, turning in this direction and that, groping, stumbling, answering to an echo of her own name that rang from the mounds and stones around her: "Anne! Anne! Anne!"

With wide open eyes and heart beating fast she started up. Had she herself called aloud her own name?—or was it someone else's voice that had aroused her? She listened intently, her brain but half conscious. Yes, it was a reality; it came again, feeble, quavering, yet distinct: "Anne! Anne!"

The girl sprang from her bed and threw on her dressing gown. Candle in hand she ran across the dining-room, and pushed aside the curtains that hung before her mother's doorway. Holding the light high above her head she strained her eyes through the gloom.

"Mother?" she called doubtfully; and a nervous chill crept through her veins as she saw the bed tumbled and empty. The next moment she was

kneeling by a white, huddled heap that lay upon the floor.

Anne had never realised until then how utterly deserted an Anglo-Indian house can be in the night-time. With almost abnormal strength she lifted her mother's unconscious form on to the bed; then rushed to the long door-windows, which were shut and bolted, and dragged them open. The cold night air struck her face and body with piercing chill; the compound was silent, even the hum of the bazaar was still, and the watchman, who was supposed to be on guard, was neither coughing nor stumping up and down—probably he was too sound asleep even to snore!

She called repeatedly, without result. The doors of the servants' quarters were close shut, not even a line of light shone from the cracks of the ill-fitting doors. There followed moments of acute distress and perplexity for Anne. She remembered her flask and ran for it, thanking Heaven that brandy was in it still. She tried to force the spirit between the clenched teeth, she rubbed it on the cold hands, and forehead, and chest.

Then, abruptly, she stood up and looked down in horror at the white, lifeless face, for the conviction had come to her that she was alone with the dead—that her mother unwittingly had fulfilled her promise, and had entered into "a long rest" from which she was never to awake.

Anne hardly knew how she found and put on a pair of shoes; how she got into a few clothes, threw on her warm dressing gown again and ran from the Mission House to the little bungalow in the corner of the compound. All she could recall afterwards was finding herself beating at the door of Mr. Wray's sitting-room—the door through which she had seen him admit a native figure but a few hours back. He opened it himself, and she noted, with vague surprise, that he was fully dressed.

They confronted each other in a silence that seemed a decade measured by emotion, though actually it lasted but a second. Wray knew by the girl's white face and strained eyes that something terrible had happened—that she had come to him for help. In the same moment she realised as by flashlight the interior of the living room beyond him. A large writing table littered with papers, a bookcase reaching halfway up the wall, an easy chair with a reading stand attached, a lamp with a green shade; and behind the lamp stood a curious figure, apparently a coolie, with naked brown arms and legs, a shabby loin cloth, and disreputable puggaree falling over one eye.

The "coolie" picked up a coarse brown blanket with haste and flung it about his shoulders as the Englishwoman appeared on the threshold. Before Wray could speak he had slipped to the door, and with a few rapid words in a low tone and a salaam

of farewell, disappeared into the night. Yet, even as he passed her, Anne recognised instinctively that the missionary's native visitor was no mere coolie!

Wray held out his hand. His face was full of alarmed concern.

"What is the matter?" he asked quickly.

"You must come with me at once," she panted, "I think my mother is dead!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE hours that followed close upon the death of Mary Williams brought Wray and Anne mentally very near to one another.

On his part, recognition of the shock the girl must have received, regret that she should have suffered such a painful experience, sympathy with her loss, opened his heart to her with a flood of tenderness—a tenderness that he did not realise had been waiting only for a channel of liberation. With Anne a sense of entire confidence in this man gave her a vast relief. She felt almost indifferent to distress and difficulty having the comfort of his presence.

Together and swiftly they had returned across the compound to the Mission House. Wray held a lantern to guide them through the darkness; Anne had clung to his arm, silent and trembling. She had stood by and watched his quick scrutiny of the rigid figure on the bed; had remained there, white and watchful, while he roused the servants and sent for the nearest doctor—the lady in charge of the Mission hospital close by; had carried out, dumbly, whatever was required of her when the wiry little woman-physician arrived, straight from a serious maternity case that had kept her up all night.

As Anne and Wray had expected, there came but the one pronouncement, "Death." Death, as far as could then be judged, from failure of the heart. Poor, simple heart, that long ago had throbbed so passionately with a great love—that had been crushed and dulled with the sudden blow from which there had never been any real recovery.

Afterwards, when the doctor had gone back to her urgent case, warmed and revived by the hot coffee ordered by Wray at the moment when they all needed it most, he and Anne Crivener faced each other in the sitting-room. A fire, also lighted by Wray's orders, had been blazing for some time on the wide hearth. Outside there was a subdued murmur of servants' voices; from the dining-room, where Tabitha had secreted herself in a corner, came sounds of stifled lamentation.

Anne shivered, and wrapped her dressing gown closer about her. The garment was of a dull rose-coloured material, soft and heavy; her hair was in a ruffled cloud above her eyes, and gathered into a knot at the nape of her neck. Just now her face was gentle with sincere feeling and forgetfulness of self; and all at once the man who stood alone with her in the firelit room was dominated, overwhelmed by the sweetness and beauty of her presence.

He turned from her in dismay—aghast at his own sensations.

"Do go and rest now—you must have some sleep," he urged.

There was appeal, which she did not recognise, as well as persuasion in his voice. He had a confused idea that once she was out of his sight he would have the strength to wrench himself free from this sudden grip of Nature—so cruel—so unexpected.

"I couldn't rest if I did lie down. I should only keep thinking of Sophia and her father coming back to this!"

"Perhaps I ought to go and tell the Drapers. Shall I ask Mrs. Draper to come over to you?" he suggested.

"Oh! don't go away! Please don't leave me," she besought him piteously; and drew nearer to him in her need of companionship and consolation, putting out her hand as though to stay him.

For a moment he touched her fingers that felt slim and cold. "It is all right," he said, as he might have reassured a child, "I will stay. Don't be afraid." He moved the easy chair forward. "Come and sit down here by the fire, and get warm. It will be dawn very soon now."

She settled herself, luxuriously, in the warmth of the flames. His touch and promise had cheered her; and as he stood leaning against the mantelpiece she looked up at him, wholly ignorant as she was of the conflict that raged in his heart, and smiled her gratitude.

"What should I have done without you?" she said. "You are so kind, and strong, and reliable!"

He did not answer; and she felt a little hurt. At the least, it would have been no more than good manners to say that he had only done what he could! But he was staring down into the fire, and did not seem to have heard her speak.

Once more she noted, with a certain admiring interest, how severely handsome were the lines of his head and face; how easy and forceful the proportions of his figure, though clothed in a shabby old suit—the one into which he had changed on his return from tennis, expecting for once a short, quiet evening, whereas he had not been to bed at all.

Anne said no more. She looked into the fire, too; and felt a little drowsy. She began to think of Dion, and considered what difference her mother's death would make in her plans. Under the circumstances she might as well go home at once. Probably Dion would be furious if she did, because there was small chance of his getting leave any earlier, and their separation would be lengthened. That, however, did not trouble Anne. She would, of course, please herself; and it would be easy enough to make the loss of her mother the excuse for not wishing to remain at Sika longer than was inevitable. She glanced again at Mr. Wray, and wondered what he was thinking about. Then smiled as she remembered how unreasonably angry she had felt with him—how viciously she had looked forward to bidding him farewell for ever!

Now it was all quite different—it had been different, in some intangible way, since yesterday afternoon when he stopped to speak to her. Why was it? Then she began to wonder what he would say if she told him of her engagement. No doubt he guessed already that there was something between her and Dion Devasse. She rather dreaded his eyes when she should tell him. Those cold, deep eyes that seemed to penetrate to her very soul! Would he divine the truth? And, if he did, she thought, with sudden defiance, what matter? Her life was hers to do with as she pleased. It was her own business—certainly not Mr. Wray's—as to the man she married, and why she married him!

Anne moved in her chair. The silence worried her; she wished to attract the padre's attention, to make him talk.

"Sophia and Mr. Williams will be back early in the morning, I think," she said. "They told me they would be back early because they had so much to do here."

Then of a sudden she felt hysterical, as she remembered her mother seated in this room, with "so much to do," in the midst of pinafores, scrapbooks, toys, and garments, only a few hours ago. Anne wished now she had responded to that last silent appeal in her mother's eyes when they bade each other good-night!

"The shock will be terrible for them," responded Wray. He roused himself and stood upright.

"Poor souls! How they will miss her! And I shall miss her too—she was very good to me," he added simply.

Something in his voice made Anne realise that, in spite of his preoccupance in his calling, there was a lonely side to his life—a blank which, with most men, is filled by a woman's care. With Wray, in a small degree, Mrs. Williams had ministered to this need; quietly she had "looked after" him, and her kind concern, troublesome though it had been at times, had supplied a touch of motherliness in his existence which meant a great deal to him. Anne knew that he would miss it keenly. Sophia was not the person with whom he could sit for a spare half-hour in reposeful silence when tired out with hard work. Sophia would never think of consulting with his old servant as to whether the supplies the sahib was taking out into camp were sufficient; nor, when he came to a meal at the Mission House, would it occur to her to provide, unobtrusively, what he would be most likely to eat. Anne had once or twice seen her mother mending socks marked "O. W.," and she had heard the old servant entreat Mrs. Williams to support him in a reminder to the sahib that it was time various new garments were ordered from England or Calcutta.

Of course, she reflected, Mr. Wray ought to marry. But who was there for him to marry? Sophia? Good heavens! Sophia would drive a man mad in a week. Anne doubted if the woman

existed who would suit Mr. Wray entirely. But, according to hearsay, he meant to remain a bachelor; and the remembrance of this echo brought with it a curious sense of satisfaction which puzzled and rather interested Anne. She began deliberately to consider why, if marriage with a suitable being would make Mr. Wray happier and more comfortable, should she, Anne Crivener, feel relieved rather than otherwise to know that the man held views which precluded him from matrimony? It was a ridiculous attitude of mind—one would almost imagine she was in love with him herself! Simultaneously with this thought the girl sat erect, startled, for the idea that had come to her so casually pierced her mind all at once with an apprehension that was dread, yet strangely sweet. Could *that* be the explanation of the disquietude of mind that had harassed her, she knew, ever since the morning of their first encounter? A little smothered sob of protest and consternation escaped her before she could control it.

Immediately Wray bent towards her in quick anxiety. "Try not to give way," he said gently; and his voice was a caress—infinitely tender. "It is hard, I know."

Anne was thankful to have an excuse for her sudden loss of self-command. Even in her most natural moments she was quick to make tactful use of a situation that might serve her own convenience.

She sighed tremulously. "We shall all miss her

so dreadfully," she said, as though in continuation of their conversation before the pause, "and how can I tell Sophia and her father—how can I possibly face them with such awful news?"

"Don't be distressed about that," he said quietly. "I will tell them. I thought, when the sun was well up and you could feel less lonely, I would go and meet them outside the city, and break it to them."

"Oh! thank you," she said, in weary relief.

To turn her thoughts and distract her mind as far as possible, he drew a chair to the other side of the hearth, seated himself, and began to talk easily, and with comfortable pauses, of various things he thought would interest her.

"Did you notice the native who passed you at my door when you came to fetch me?" he asked her. "That was the son of the Thanesur Rajah. Perhaps you remember our talking about him at the Stapelys' that morning at breakfast?"

"Yes, I remember," said Anne. She felt she was scarcely likely to forget a single detail of that day. "You owned to having given him a Hindi Testament, and every one seemed to think he would have a bad time if he persisted in his inquiries. Wasn't that it?"

"Practically. Poor fellow! It's very hard to know how best to help him." Wray's tone was full of anxiety. "He came to me last night disguised as a coolie because he wanted to talk to

me, and he found he was being watched at home—they burnt the copy of the Testament I gave him when they found out what it was, and he asked me to let him have another."

"And did you?"

"Yes. What else could I do? I only wish I was able to see more of him. The danger with a youth of this sort is that if he becomes discontented with his own religion, and receives no direct Christian teaching, he may relapse into absolute Atheism."

"Fall between two stools!" said Anne, helplessly aware of her own triteness.

"Of course one can only do one's best," he continued. "As far as I could gather the boy has no actual intention at present of becoming a Christian. He is simply out of tune with his life and surroundings; he recognises the weak spots in his own creed, and is much interested in, and impressed by, the teaching of our religion. But the prejudice against Christianity among the real Brahmins, as being a faith that destroys caste and is suitable, in their eyes, only to pariahs and people of the lowest class, is so violent that many of them will not tolerate even the investigation of it in their households. Ramanund's father is like that."

"Then what will happen if his son goes against his wishes?"

"That is just what worries me," said Wray. "If Ramanund were an ordinary native it would be comparatively easy to help and advise him, and I

should have great hopes of his conversion; but as it is, he would only be able to come and see me by stealth, which I can't encourage, and I am afraid he will have no chance in the end against his people and the priests. I am desperately afraid some terrible pressure may be brought to bear on him, and he will just have to give in."

Then, unwilling to weary her perhaps with his own difficulties, he went on to tell her of the old fakir who had lately died in the city, after lying, voluntarily, in the same attitude without moving for over sixty years. He gave her, too, a graphic little description of a native village school, with its mud-plastered floor, the birds and insects busy in the raftered roof, the glimpse of hot sun, and fruit trees, and yellow soil outside; then the schoolmaster with his horn spectacles, his embroidered skull cap, and his rod; the boys with their primitive wooden slates, reed pens, and chalk-and-water writing medium, swaying to and fro, repeating their lessons in a monotonous clamour. Anne also listened, fascinated, to a weird story of the Mutiny that had been told to Wray by a very old native—of how two Englishmen, one notorious for his evil deeds, the other famous for his charity, fell into the hands of the mutineers, who murdered the good man and spared the other's life because they were afraid of the bad man's ghost!

"What creatures!" said Anne with exasperation.

"And yet you come out here and give these people all the best years of your life!"

He smiled and was silent. Then he spoke, abstractedly looking away from her. "Yes," he said, "in obedience to the Divine Command. What good should I be here if the people already understood and believed all that I could tell them? The force of ignorance and superstition is one of our strongest enemies. But an enemy that may be fought—and beaten!"

Now into his eyes came the rapt, mystic light that Anne recognised and resented—that repelled, yet magnetised her. A sense of angry helplessness pervaded her being. This spiritual fervour seemed to remove him so far from her, to exalt him from the man into the saint, the prophet; and she craved for the power to dispel it.

The moments passed. Neither of them spoke. And presently the girl became conscious that her reason was battling fiercely with an insane impulse—a wild longing to throw herself on his breast, offer him her lips, put her arms about his neck. . . .

The wood fire flared suddenly. A charred log fell asunder with a splutter of sparks and little flames, and the noise brought Anne to her senses.

She stood up and rested her hand upon the mantelpiece to hold herself steady. Wray also rose from his chair. Even in her discomfiture she noted with a sense of triumph, that the inspired expression

had faded from his face; indeed, for a moment she fancied that a very human warmth had come into the eyes lately so impenetrable and unseeing. But Anne determined to control herself; she knew she was unbalanced, unnerved by her mother's sudden death; she also recognised, with quick, vivid insight, that a subtle danger threatened her peace,—the danger of falling in love passionately and completely, and without hope. Something must be done; she must save herself; she *would* not have her future marred.

Again she met his eyes, looked into the firm, sensitive face, and felt desperate. Then she caught hastily at what seemed the most present means of protection.

She passed her hand across her forehead, and wondered if her voice would sound natural. "I think perhaps I could sleep now," she began. "I will take your advice and go and rest. But there is something—" she drew herself up, threw back her head slightly, and paused to choose her words —an old remedy of Granny's against nervousness which returned to her involuntarily—"something I should like to tell you, now, about myself, because you have been so good, so helpful, such a friend to me—and I should like you to know."

"Yes?"

His eyes were only kind, his voice no more than interested. Had there been tenderness, or the faintest hint of passion in tone or look, she might have

broken down; and it was well for her that she could not know how his heart was throbbing—how, beneath that calm exterior, a flame had sprung up and was burning fiercely—a flame that only the agony of hard and bitter resolution could ever quench.

"I am engaged to be married—to Captain Devasse," she said steadily. But she did not look at him or she would have seen "the eyes like a mountain lake without sunshine" change to the colour of a southern sea. Otherwise there was no betrayal of his feelings.

"He is a good fellow—I hope you will be happy," she heard him say, "and thank you for telling me. Of course, I saw—I guessed, rather."

"Yes," she interposed, with a little forced laugh. "I am afraid most people must have guessed, except, perhaps, my own relations; and purposely we have kept it from them—because—because of my mother. We did not mean to tell her just yet. I knew it would be a shock to her."

"And now, I suppose, it will be a secret no longer?"

"Oh! I hardly know," said Anne, with an impatient movement that she could not arrest; "nothing is actually settled yet—I may go home quite soon, or I may wait. It depends."

"On whom?"

The unexpected question startled her. She felt at bay.

"On myself, of course," she answered flippantly,

and held out her hand. "Good-night, Mr. Wray—though it is really good-morning. Look at the light coming in through the window!"

She pointed to the door opposite. Through the upper panels of glass there showed the first gleam of the Eastern dawn; and when Anne had aroused Tabitha from an uneasy rest in the dining-room, and both had disappeared, Oliver Wray opened the door and stepped into the veranda.

Outside, the silence that broods before morning overlapped the faint stir that heralds the rising of the sun. In the atmosphere there was a chill peace, the spirit of the dying night that lingered yet. The light deepened. Sounds of the day's approach grew louder. Birds and little animals rustled in the grass and creepers, horses neighed, and fowls and goats uttered eager cries in the distance; voices went up from the bazaar.

For Wray the world seemed strangely different. His mind was in a tumult. He felt shaken; without courage; utterly adrift. Anne's news about herself had revealed to him finally, and beyond all doubt, that he loved her. But against the despairing knowledge that into his life had come the one trial he had least anticipated, the saving fact remained that there was no question of the love being mutual. He hardly dared to contemplate the sadness that the situation must have held for them both had Anne been free, had she found herself drawn towards him as woman to man; and it never

occurred to him to think but that she loved her future husband.

Anne! For just a little space he yielded to the intoxication of his secret. The roses lifting their heads after the night's slumber seemed to breathe of Anne; the scent of the jessamine that climbed the trelliswork at the end of the veranda thrilled him with thoughts of her; the soft, sweet cooing of the doves, awake on the roof of the bungalow, filled his heart with the echo of her name.

CHAPTER XV

On New Year's Eve the Stapelys gave a large dinner party. The invitations were three weeks old—an honourable age for a Sika invitation; special stores and wine had come up from Bombay; the more important guests lent the assistance of their head table servants for the occasion; and extra items of glass, crockery, and plate had been borrowed and loaned in that spirit of friendly understanding only to be met with in lands of exile, and among Anglo-Indians particularly.

Mrs. Stapely described the entertainment with proud satisfaction as "quite a Station affair" (Mr. Stapely called it a "damned nuisance"), and all she regretted was that owing to the recent death of Mrs. Williams it had not been possible for the beautiful Miss Crivener to come, and also that her own mother had been obliged to leave them before the date of the entertainment. The Judge's wife had hoped, secretly, to prevail upon "the young couple" to have their engagement announced at her party. That would have given so much more distinction to the evening than the police officer's squeaky performance on the violin, her own rendering of "Ruby," or the Irish doctor's sentimental ballad

which they all knew so well and applauded so loyally—"The spell is broken—we must part." However, Mrs. Stapely had been successful in obtaining Miss Crivener's promise to spend the following afternoon with her, in order to "hear all about it"; and the girl, oppressed by the sorrowful atmosphere of the Mission House, and being herself in a restless, unsatisfactory condition of mind, was not sorry to have the little distraction, for since her mother's funeral, on Christmas Day, she had hardly been beyond the compound.

Dion was away. A regimental complication had arisen necessitating the visit of one of the officers to a detachment quartered at a station a good deal further up country; and to his excessive annoyance Captain Devasse was selected for the duty. The order came, he considered, at a most inopportune time—just when Anne needed him most, shocked and upset as she was by her loss. Still, as he explained anxiously to his lady, a soldier "couldn't help himself, he had to do what he was told"; and he assured her he would not be absent for a single moment longer than was inevitable.

Anne had helped Mr. Williams and Sophia considerably after their terrible home-coming. She knew what her mother's intentions had been concerning all the Christmas gifts, and understood the much corrected lists and memoranda. Rather to her own surprise she felt a real desire to give her aid, and did all in her power to be of use and comfort.

Sophia rejoiced genuinely, and with a truly pious unselfishness, that her step-mother was happy and at rest in Heaven. She talked of angels, of the glorious change, and the blessed city; but for herself she missed her dear companion sorely, and her swollen eyes and pale face told of tearful nights and much heartache in spite of her brave serenity.

The silent grief of Mr. Williams was pitiable to see. He said nothing, he went about his work much as usual; but his rugged face grew drawn and hollow, all at once his beard and hair seemed greyer, he looked broken, old. Into his manner towards Anne there came a quiet change. He was gentler, more friendly, even almost deferential; and she knew that it was for her mother's sake—that because Mary had loved this alien daughter of hers so tenderly, he was striving to love her too. But Anne could not know, as well, of the bitter remorse and self-blame that scorched the poor old missionary's heart; how he remembered every little thought and feeling of jealousy towards the girl whose presence had been such a joy to his wife; how he tortured himself with the fear that his hostile feelings towards his step-daughter, honestly though he had struggled to overcome and conceal them, had perhaps debarred Mary from the full enjoyment of her pleasure.

Anne was touched. She had always respected and in a fashion appreciated Mr. Williams, though she had not liked him; and she responded readily

to his tacit advances, quite as much from reciprocation of feeling as from her innate preference for being on good terms with everybody about her.

Oliver Wray she had seen daily in the course of this sad week. He came often to the bungalow to help Mr. Williams in any way that might present itself, and he sat with the latter in his study in the evenings, lingering afterwards to talk to Anne and Sophia on his way out—though it was an ordeal to him to go voluntarily into Anne's presence. His impulse was to shut himself from the sight of her, to avoid her by every means. Yet, when he was away from her, how he craved to see her face, to hear the sound of her voice!

On New Year's Day he came to the Mission House just at Anne was starting for the Stapelys. A long morning's work in the schools, and trouble later with a refractory convert, had kept him busy until now, and it was past three o'clock in the afternoon. They exchanged a few words, and he looked up at the clouds that since yesterday had gathered with such ominous determination in the sky.

"It will rain to-night," he said, "perhaps before."

They stood silent, captives to the dull quiet of the sunless atmosphere, disturbed by the sweet scent of flowers wafted towards them from the creepers and the garden outside. The melancholy, drawn-out cry of a religious mendicant, wandering along the road beyond the compound, quavered on the still, heavy

air; and the weird sound filled Anne with a sense of indefinite foreboding.

"Oh!" she said, with a shudder, "what is the matter with me? I feel—" she turned to Wray with a little hysterical laugh—"as if I had done something wrong, and was going to be found out!"

"It's the weather," he answered flatly; "I expect you miss the sun."

He had a feeling that he ought to have said, "You miss your mother—it is the trouble you are in." But an instinct whispered that this was not altogether the reason of Anne's depression. It was something else. And a sudden fear fell upon him, which made him shrink from asking, even of himself, what it was. Mutually they turned from one another. Anne entered the gharry that awaited her. Wray went into the house.

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"Yes, I do wish you could have been here last night!" Mrs. Stapely was saying to Anne for the twentieth time.

They were in the drawing-room, which was all wicker chairs, embroidered hangings, jail-made rugs, carved tables, and native trifles of brass, copper, and silver. Mrs. Stapely preferred country-made things around her; she felt more at home with them than with English productions, which, besides being expensive, quickly became damaged with the Indian climate. Anne, looking about the room, decided that her hostess was right from an artistic

as well as a practical point of view, though probably the little lady was unconscious of the fact. The curtains, the carpets, the bowls, the trays, with their bright colours, daring designs, and richness of detail, suited the great room with the lofty ceiling and expanse of wall far better than would have done any attempt at European effect.

"It must have been delightful," said Anne, who had heard all there was to hear concerning the dinner party, and the guests. "How well you must have done it!"

"Yes, and with the least possible expense. I can't tell you how I slaved and toiled over every little item so as to get our money's worth. You see, everybody always thinks civilians are so well off, but I assure you we find it all we can do to keep out of debt, having to send so much money home for the twins, and Griff's sister, and other things. We *must* save now, because Griff has taken it into his head that Babba is becoming too obstreperous and ought not to stay out here. He made me take the twins home long before they were Babba's age, which was unnecessary; and I shall never forget the awful time I had with them on board ship, and how uncomfortable everything seemed in England when we arrived. We went to Griff's sister in London, straight from the docks, got there late in the afternoon, and because I wanted to send a telegram to him in India at once, to say we were all right, she was quite cross and disagreeable, and said she

hadn't twenty servants and there was nobody to take it to the post-office unless she went herself! And then the *fuss* there was about our luggage, and all our dirty clothes, and the things the twins would not eat, and because I let the bath water run over. Oh!" throwing up her hands, "defend me from English life!"

Anne looked out of the open window. She saw Babba on the lawn attempting to play cricket with a bevy of servants who were willing enough to neglect their legitimate duties to help to amuse "the little sahib." The child was screaming orders at the pitch of his shrill voice, stamping, waving his bat (he was, of course, permanently "in"), tyrannising outrageously over his pliant companions. When he missed a ball they reproached and derided the bowler, who was the son of the butler, for being such an execrable shot. When Babba did happen to hit the ball the applause was vehement and the fielding purposely bad, while the little boy ran backwards and forwards triumphantly, his thin flaxen hair in disorder, his elfin face strained and eager with excitement and pride.

"I suppose India *is* very bad for children?" said Anne tentatively.

Mrs. Stapely bristled at once. "Yes, I know people say that!" she argued, "but, after all, children are very happy out here, and their naughtiness is all on the surface. Then, natives are so wonderfully patient with them and devoted; and if they do give in to the children, isn't it much better than

letting the poor mites fly into passions? An English nurse will oppose a child on principle over some trifle, and the result is a fearful scene, trying for everybody, and bad for the child's health; whereas a native would cleverly distract its attention and the whole thing would pass off peaceably. I believe in *preventing* children from being naughty, instead of making them so!"

Anne was privately of opinion that Babba did not require much making, but she accepted Mrs. Stapely's protests; and, certainly, Babba's failings were not of a very harmful nature.

He was a tender-hearted little person, too, in spite of his arrogance. Anne had seen him cry piteously over the death of a tame squirrel, and when his old ayah, whom ordinarily he bullied so unmercifully, was ill, he was overcome with distress and anxiety, and, native-wise, would not eat willingly until she was better. Yes, Anne had come across many children reared in England who were far more objectionable. Conceited little monkeys, underhand, odiously precocious, even positively purse-proud and pretentious!

"I am always afraid Babba may do something specially masterful sooner or later," went on Mrs. Stapely, "and that Griffith will pack us both off home at a moment's notice. I really believe he would be rather glad of the excuse, so that he could finish his book in peace, all by himself, without any interruption!"

"Well, if such a misfortune is to occur, let us

hope it may happen before I go home—then we could travel together!"

Anne spoke lightly, without the least meaning what she said.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Stapely, "that would make all the difference in the world. I really don't believe I should mind going ahead of Griff if I could travel with you."

Anne thought of Babba, and repented her airy cordiality. "Well," she said with caution, "I'm afraid there is not much chance of it, delightful as it would be for me, of course. I am sure Babba is not likely to misbehave himself to such an extent, and, in any case, you would not like him to go home so early in the year, when it is cold and horrible! *I* shall probably be starting before the end of the month."

"Oh! really? I did not know you had decided anything."

"There is nothing to keep me here now." As she said this a curious little angry pain shot through her heart.

"Oh! and what about Captain Devasse?" Mrs. Stapely suggested, with an arch smile. "You said he couldn't get leave till the late spring, didn't you?"

Anne retorted in the same spirit. "I shall have quite enough of his company later!" and forced herself to join in the other's feminine appreciation of the joke.

"But seriously, you know, you ought to announce your engagement. People have begun to talk. Have you told Mr. and Miss Williams yet?"

"No—not yet."

"Well, then you ought to—now there is no reason for secrecy. I can't think why you don't."

"Yes, I must tell them—directly Dion comes back."

"When will that be?"

"To-morrow, I expect; but it is just possible he may turn up to-day. I told him he would find me here if he did. I knew you would not mind."

"Of course not. I hope he will come!" Mrs. Stapely enjoyed seeing the engaged couple together; and she was burning to tell everybody that she had known the secret from the first.

Babba came running into the room. "Rain falleth," he announced pompously in Hindustani. He still grasped his cricket bat, which he brandished to the peril of everything around him.

Mrs. Stapely got up and looked out of the window. "So it does!" she exclaimed, as though Babba might be credited with having made some remarkable discovery.

The cold, heavy stillness of the afternoon was broken now by the smack of huge raindrops on hard soil and dry leaves. First they fell slowly, with irregular pauses, then faster and with more violence. Soon it was almost impossible to hear anything else; and the noise muffled the rattle of

wheels outside and the little stir of an arrival in the front vēranda.

It was Dion Devasse, eager for the sight of his beloved, having endured tortures of impatience in a venerable and deliberate "ticca gharry," hired at the last moment in view of the approaching rain, that he might not present himself damp and untidy from the closeness of macintosh and leggings.

"Oh! here you are!" cried Mrs. Stapely, with hospitable pleasure. "This *is* nice!"

He shook hands with her warmly, his eyes, all the time, on Anne, who stood against the long window, slight and graceful in her black dress—one that she had worn when in mourning for Granny, one that had been too expensive, well-made, and becoming to discard. The radiant eyes and ardent demeanour of her lover smote Anne with a sense of repulsion. She felt angrily annoyed with herself for the sensation. It was perverse, stupid, unreasonable—and yet she could not help it! Between her and the handsome, glowing face that bent towards hēr own (Mrs. Stapely had turned away discreetly) there interposed the vision of another face, with grey eyes cold yet compelling, distant yet tender with all the charity of a brave, clean soul.

Dion felt her shrink from his proffered kiss. He drew back and regarded her with concern, holding both her hands in his.

"What is it, darling?" he asked in a low tone. "Aren't you glad to have me back?"

For a moment Anne felt that had Mrs. Stapely not been present she must have pushed him away from her; cried out that she did not want him; besought him to leave her for ever. His return, after their brief separation, seemed to have crystallised the fact that she did not love him—to the obliteration of all other considerations; and in her perplexed emotion she lost sight of the object of her engagement and intended marriage, forgot that to be his wife meant the fulfilment of all that she had looked upon as making existence of positive value. She stood silent, hearing the noisy beat of the rain outside on the hard ground, not daring to look into Dion's anxious eyes, and feeling a boundless relief when suddenly Babba darted from behind a carved screen, where he had been personating a tiger hidden in the jungle, and dealt Captain Devasse a violent blow on the calf of the leg with his cricket bat, retreating again with equal rapidity to his lair.

Dion turned with a muffled exclamation. Mrs. Stapely hastened forward with apologies to him, and a scolding for Babba, who, still a tiger, ran from the shelter of the screen to behind a curtain, as from one patch of jungle to another, and roared horribly, deaf to his mother's reproaches. She attempted to dislodge him, but he wound himself tightly into the curtain from head to foot. She tried persuasion—said that Buria, ayah, had got his tea all ready and the khansamah had made a sponge cake; but also without effect. Babba only swathed

himself the more closely, and roared with greater fierceness.

At last Captain Devasse, who was fond of children, as all true sportsmen are lovers of the young and helpless, declared loudly that he was an elephant, and that the sahib in the howdah on his back was afraid the tiger might spring. Trumpeting, he advanced towards the curtain; and the lower part, that now resembled a gigantic sausage, untwisted with much struggling. Then the tiger sprang—sprang into strong, kind arms that hoisted the little boy on to a broad shoulder. And elephant and tiger left the room at a gallop, laughing, shouting, delighted.

"How sweet of him!" cried Mrs. Stapely. "Oh! Miss Crivener, what a good husband you will have!"

"I am very lucky," said Anne conventionally; but this little illustration and reminder of Dion's simple kindliness of heart gave her a sense of shame. She knew how badly she was treating him.

When he came back after delivering Babba, now manageable and happy, over to the grateful Buria, she tried to be more responsive in her manner, to acknowledge, indirectly, his obvious devotion, to appear interested in the details of his absence, though all the time she dreaded that Mrs. Stapely, prompted by considerate tact, would go out of the room and leave them alone together. She was quite glad when Mr. Stapely joined them, and tea was

brought in, to know she was safe for the present. The feeling of security stimulated her to make small-talk, at which she was an adept, having been well-grounded from childhood in the art. Even Mr. Stapely, steeped as he was in his work, private as well as official, became animated, almost frivolous, and rather enjoyed himself. Only when the talk turned accidentally to missions, and their success in India, did there creep into the conversational atmosphere a real intensity.

Mr. Stapely, who, once started on a subject, was prone to lecture, gave it as his opinion that Christianity would never so much as touch the core of the Hindu heart.

"You cannot really change them," he said. "Why, what have the Mohammedans ever actually done in a thousand years towards producing a radical change in Hindu thought, except by violence? And don't we all know that those of the Hindus who are most closely connected with Europeans are the very ones to display the greatest animosity and revolt against our rule and customs? It is the villagers, the peasants, who don't come into continual contact with us, who regard us with the most tolerance and respect—not the people who know all our habits, and religion, and ways of thought! Christianity has been preached in India for nearly four hundred years, from the days of Xavier, who was a canny old saint and knew better than to waste his time, and so went off to Japan (with

much greater success) after two or three years of disheartening failure in this country! All the same, the Jesuits that came after him did something, far more than any modern Protestant missionary has ever done—in *my* humble opinion."

"And how did they manage it?" inquired Anne, with a burning interest that astonished herself.

"They took into consideration the prejudices of the people, even adopted their customs, their dress, their manner of living. Consequently they were accepted and welcomed by high and low, and were allowed to preach as brother devotees who had made a pilgrimage from a far land in order to learn as well as teach; and their teaching was respected and in many cases followed with readiness. Imagine the lives they must have led! Native food, accommodation, clothes, surroundings, smells,—all foreign to their nature and habits. It is only that type of missionary, I am firmly convinced, who would ever be able really to impress the native. And those men certainly succeeded, if you can judge by the number of conversions they made, until the Church stepped in and shut down on their methods!"

"They were ripping old chaps, of course," said Captain Devasse practically, "but doesn't it seem rather like doing evil that good might come? They must have winked at a lot that no Protestant missionary would ever tolerate, however many converts it might gain him."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Stapely impartially, rather

pleased than otherwise to encounter argument, however superficial, "and of course that was the reason the Church interfered. But what sort of people are the converts recruited from to-day?—from any class that may hope to benefit, and can lose nothing, by turning Christian!—from outcasts, drunkards, idiots, widows who want to marry again, even criminals."

"No, indeed!" interrupted Anne hotly. "I know that lots of respectable natives are converted."

"No doubt. But a native may be eminently respectable and yet come of such a low caste that it is no disadvantage or disgrace to him to adopt the religion of the English. What I was trying to convey was that Christianity has no attraction for the better caste native, whether rajah or ryot, and never will have——"

Mrs. Stapely frowned at her husband to remind him that Anne belonged to the Mission circle, "though," she added to herself, "I am sure nobody would imagine it."

The colour deepened in Anne's cheeks. "I know of one very high-caste native who would become a Christian, I believe, with little persuasion, if he were only a free agent."

"You mean Thanesur's son, of course. Well, you may tell our good friend Padre Wray that nothing but trouble all round can come of interference in that quarter."

"I think he is perfectly right to interfere—if you

can call it interference," said Anne stiffly; and into her mind there came the echo of a sentence—"*In obedience to the Divine Command.*" She could see Wray standing before her in the firelight, hear the clear, quiet voice speaking the words.

"Well," persisted Mr. Stapely, who had not the gift of tact, "he'll only make things infernally uncomfortable, not to say dangerous, for Ramanund; but I suppose he thinks the boy's soul is of more importance than his bodily safety."

Then Anne found she was on the verge of losing her temper, articulately, with Mr. Stapely, and to betray that she had lost her temper was a mistake that Anne had never yet made.

She looked out of the window and said pleasantly: "I really believe the rain is lessening. I don't in the least want to go, but I think perhaps we had better take the opportunity before it gets worse, don't you, Dion? Someone told me it went on for a week when it once began at this time of year."

Dion rose with eagerness. At last he was to have Anne to himself!

"By Jove, yes!—it does seem a bit less vicious just at present, and we may be in for a second flood before nightfall. Come along, Anne. I kept the old ark of a gharry. We shall be Mr. and Mrs. Noah!"

Farewells were said, last commonplaces exchanged, and Anne and her *fiancé* were seen off in

the gharry through the thick, steady downpour of rain.

Mrs. Stapely put her arm through her husband's as they turned back into the house.

"Goodness, Griff!" she cried, "how could you be so stupid. I am sure you have offended Miss Crivener with all your absurd opinions about converts and missions. Didn't you notice how she changed the subject and got up to go? You might have remembered that she comes of missionary people herself, and held your tongue!"

"My dear," said the Judge calmly, "it was not about converts or missions that she was disturbed. I am inclined to think she takes a particular interest in Oliver Wray."

"But she is going to marry Captain Devasse! And I *know* she is in love with him. She would never look at a missionary. My dear boy, you must be quite crazy."

Mr. Stapely smiled; and inquired how much extra charcoal she had been obliged to allow for the cooking of last night's dinner—a question that effectually turned the subject.

CHAPTER XVI

ALL the way back to the Mission House the noise of the rain and the rattle of the gharry rendered conversation very difficult. After one or two ineffectual efforts to make each other hear with comfort, Anne and Dion sat silent, looking out at widening pools of water and woe-begone native figures trudging along wrapt in brown blankets or crouched in the shelter of the trees.

Dion was pondering as to why Anne should have given him such a cold reception on his arrival at the Judge's bungalow. It was true that, very soon afterwards, she had been quite herself again, kind and gracious; but at first, though he knew she was never demonstrative, it had seemed as if she actually regretted his return.

He glanced at her clear profile. There was a pensive sadness in its lines—and, surely, her face was thinner! Dion turned fiercely upon himself. What a selfish brute he was!—of course, her mother's death had tried her severely; one didn't get over those things in a moment; and, poor darling, she had had particularly hard luck coming all the way out to India, and meeting with such trouble so soon. He had burst into the room forgetting all that, and had expected to find her in

good spirits!—and then, of course, by Jove! she had been in a funk that he was going to kiss her before Mrs. Stapely!—he had very nearly done it, too! That explained it all. What an ass he was not to understand things more quickly. Dion gave a sigh of relief, took a cigar out of his case, and in absurd pantomime, that made Anne laugh, obtained leave to light it.

She, too, was feeling relieved, because Dion did not appear to have been hurt by the lack of warmth in her greeting to him. But, all the same, the incident had awakened her to the need of facing her position. Her instinct was to ignore disagreeables, as had been Granny's practice in the old days induced by a vague notion that non-recognition of anything unpleasant must lead to its extinction. And certainly it was remarkable, reflected Anne as they rattled and splashed along the road, how frequently the system had proved successful in the stifling of a tiresome difficulty.

But there was no evading the present situation. It demanded immediate attention, and necessitated firm decision. She must "pull herself together," and without delay; she must shut out from her heart this strange, distracting influence—an influence that, whatever happened in the future, she knew, well enough, could never be quite forgotten—that every day made it more of an effort to keep up any semblance of sincerity in her relationship with Dion Devasse.

She realised, with dismay, that she had almost ceased to look forward, that of late she had seldom thought of her new life, or pictured the social triumphs, the luxury, the pleasures that awaited her in it. Yet to forego it all would be impossible! and the very notion of such a step acted as a restorative to her ambition that had flagged since the moment that her better nature had drawn breath.

All the old terror of poverty and dependence, the shrinking from a life of work, even perhaps of comparative hardship, rose up like an angry demon threatened with neglect. "I must have money," it shrieked within her, "I must have ease and power. I must be among the right people—in the front ranks. I will not go under. I will not suffer. I will take, and keep, all that I can seize for myself—all that is practically mine already through my own efforts, and schemes, and cleverness. . . ."

Yes, yes, everything should be settled at once. She would go home as soon as possible; and then her sojourn in this horrible country would seem like a dream; she would forget; the vision of grey eyes and a haunting voice would leave her mercifully alone, would harass her no longer.

She touched her companion on the arm; and in eager response he turned to her.

"Make the man walk the horses," she called to him.

Devasse put his head out into the rain and roared the order.

When they could hear each other speak in their normal voices Anne explained that she had something to say to him before they reached the Mission House. "Sophia may be at home," she said, "and we should get no chance of a talk."

Then she put her hand into his. "I want to have things definitely planned, Dion."

"You can't want it more than I do," he answered with fervour, and kissed her wrist; "but I've waited for you to decide—I didn't know what difference your mother's death might make; and when I began about it before, you know, you stopped me dead! Anne, do you want to go home ahead of me as we had arranged, or couldn't you wait and let us go together? Don't you think that would be a ripping plan?"

"But you might not be able to get leave till May, Dion; and I don't think I could ever stand the heat."

"No, of course not," he said in hasty apology; "it would not be fair on you—the heat's dreadful, and you might get fever or something. I should go mad with fright if you were ill, my sweet!"

Anne saw her chance. "I can't say I feel very fit now," she said, with a deprecating laugh, "I don't think India quite agrees with me, and the Mission House is so depressing. I am in the way, too. Mr. Williams and Sophia don't want me, though they are very kind."

"Couldn't you stay with the Stapelys for a bit?"

he suggested. "It doesn't begin to be hot till March. I'm sure they'd have you like a shot."

"Oh! no, I couldn't do that. Mrs. Stapely gets on my nerves, and I know I should murder Babba before I'd been there a week. I think, really, it would be much better if I went home about the end of this month."

Dion groaned. "It's so beastly near. How shall I ever bear to part with you! But if you're not feeling fit, darling—and you do look awfully pulled down—of course it's the only thing to do; and I must just make up my mind to it. And look here now!"—he spoke with a certain diffidence—"about your passage?—as you are going home to marry me, your passage will be my affair, of course. If you had been coming out to marry me I should have taken it for you, so it comes to the same thing."

Anne felt amused. She could hardly tell him that, according to this statement, he owed her the passage money from England, since she certainly *had* come out to marry him!

She decided to allow him to have his way. It would bind her more firmly to him still—besides which she could not very conveniently afford a second voyage so soon!

"Oh! I don't like you to do that," she demurred. "I thought of going second-class."

"Great Scot!" shouted Dion, "*you* go second-class! Not if I'm alive to prevent it, my dear. I'll wire for the best first-class cabin available P. and

O. for the end of the month. A four-berth cabin to yourself, and I shall take you down to Bombay, and see you safely on board. If that wouldn't be proper, Sophia must come too, only she'd have to travel back with me alone, and think of the scandal in Sika! I might have to marry her."

"Oh! I can't be jilted for Sophia," said Anne, and laughed lightly. "Dion—don't," she drew herself away from him; "we are just getting into the bazaar!"

"A gharry's too confoundedly public!" Dion grumbled.

Anne felt glad that it was so. And she was not sorry to see Sophia standing in the veranda when they drove up to the Mission House;—Sophia with a sopping pith hat on her head, from which ran trickles of black water, dyed by the piece of crape she had twisted about the crown. She was discarding with care an old brown cloak, her shoes were caked with mud, and she was altogether a very miserable and dilapidated object.

"Look!" whispered Dion, as they drew up at the foot of the steps. "That settles it now and for ever. Anne, you are jilted for Sophia. What man living could resist her?"

Anne checked her impulse to laugh. Dion was ungenerous, but then he could not know, as did she, of the real excellence of heart that lay beneath Sophia's homely appearance, rendered undeniably ridiculous at the present moment by her plight.

"Don't come in; go straight back, Dion," she said confidentially. "Sophia has evidently been caught in the rain, and I ought to help her get dry and comfortable. Besides, I want to tell her about ourselves before Mr. Williams comes in. You won't forget," as he clasped her hand, "to telegraph as soon as possible about my passage? It is so *dear* of you!"

"Forget? I wish I could!" he answered; and dived into the gharry that jolted him out of the compound.

"Oh! I am so wet!" cried Sophia dismally, and threw her dripping cloak over the back of a cane chair. "Mr. Draper and I had been down to the far end of the city seeing to an infant school we have just started there under the charge of a native Christian teacher, and the rain had begun when we left. I thought it might come, so luckily I had taken my cloak, though I don't think it was much protection. Mr. Draper must have got drenched, and the poor man is far from strong. I *hope* he will be none the worse!"

"Oh! bother Mr. Draper," said Anne, with impatient disrespect. "His wife can look after him."

"That's just what I am afraid she doesn't do!" Sophia argued with concern, as she followed her domineering step-sister into the bungalow. "She ought to have reminded him to take his coat. She thinks of her own health before she thinks of his."

"Well, you had better think of your own now,

for a change," said Anne. "Why didn't you hire a gharry back?" and she hurried the damp Sophia into her room, and called for Tabitha, and tea, and hot water. "It is really exasperating," she scolded, "that you good people, who devote your lives to duty, should be so stupid about taking care of yourselves. I suppose that is why one hears so much about missionaries breaking down. *'Martyrs to the cause.'* Martyrs to bad food, and carelessness, and want of ordinary comfort and common-sense!"

"Oh! Annie, dear!" cried Sophia, and turned to expostulate.

"Now don't talk. Change *everything* you have got on, put your feet in hot water, and drink some tea; or *you* will be the next 'martyr'—and serve you right!"

It was a certain relief to Anne, in her present frame of mind, to rail at something; and Sophia's gentle bewilderment proved no check to the outlet. Anne made further severe remarks, and then, having ascertained that Sophia was really dry and warm, she went to her bedroom feeling faintly ashamed of herself, yet consciously refreshed. She even laughed at her own ebullition of temper—so entirely misunderstood by its victim!

Later, when she came into the sitting-room, she found Mr. Williams there in consultation with his daughter over some school matters. He had not been caught in the rain ("What a wonder!" thought Anne), but had been writing in his study since the downpour began.

Anne saw but little chance now of informing Sophia, privately, of her position, if she was to divulge it to-day; and she decided that it would be more satisfactory to let father and daughter hear her news simultaneously, and at once.

"Are you all right now, Sophia?" she inquired, with affectionate solicitude. "You know," turning to Mr. Williams, "she was literally wet through, and didn't seem to realise how dangerous it is to stand about in damp clothes, so I'm afraid I spoke to her rather crossly!"

Anne smiled enchantingly on Sophia, who grovelled without resistance.

"You were awfully kind, dear," she protested with eager generosity, "I am sure you saved me a terrible cold, and it is so difficult to remember to take care of oneself, isn't it, father?"

Mr. Williams glanced at Anne from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"It was very good of you to look after her," he said, in a level tone; and Anne knew he was forcing back the old animosity and distrust towards her—trying hard not to suspect that her concern for Sophia was assumed, or to consider that she was unnecessarily officious.

"Are you busy?" she inquired with disarming humility, "because if you aren't there is something I should like to tell you both."

"We have just finished," said Sophia readily, and gathered up the papers. "What is it, Anne?"

"Oh! I couldn't tell you standing up like this,"

objected Anne, "do come and sit down comfortably, and then perhaps I can say it."

They followed her towards the fireplace, but Mr. Williams remained standing, while the other two sat down. Anne felt rather as if she were taking part in private theatricals, and could not resist aiming at an effect. She leaned forward and looked from Sophia's expectant gaze to the stolid countenance of Mr. Williams, who avoided her eyes.

"I am engaged to be married," she announced sweetly—"to Captain Devasse. Perhaps I ought to have said something about it before,—it happened a little time ago, but—but——"

She paused, and then John Williams turned to her with an awkward gesture of comprehension.

"I—I think I understand," he said, "you did not wish to let her know—to surprise or upset her sooner than you could help, and now she is—gone —you feel that you can speak?"

She nodded.

"Thank you, my dear." His honest old eyes were misty, and the broad, thick hand he held out to his step-daughter was shaking. Anne pressed it for a moment. She did not say anything, but gave him a look that was expressive.

Sophia, who had been speechless with excitement, now found her voice.

"Oh! Anne!" She jumped up and threw herself on her knees beside her step-sister, clasping her round the waist. "Oh! Anne! I am so glad you are happy. I hope you will be happy all your life

long. And to think that I never suspected anything. I only thought he was a very old friend, that you had been children together, or something, and that he was more like your brother. But now I see!"

Sophia wept, and kissed her vehemently, between countless questions; and Anne accepted the damp caresses and answered the questions till her patience began to fail. She felt that if Sophia continued to kiss her with loud smacks and pursed lips she should hit her. Fortunately, Mr. Williams interfered in time.

"Now, now, Sophia—calm yourself," he said, in kind reproach, "you must think of Anne a little. Look, you have crumpled all that pretty lace arrangement! Get up, my dear, and leave us for a little while. I should like a few words in private with your sister."

With a last resounding salute, followed by loving apologies and clumsy attempts to straighten the lace at Anne's throat, Sophia scrambled to her feet. Then with backward looks she obeyed her father and left the room.

Anne felt a little startled. What did the old man want to say to her? His keen, direct gaze would make prevarication rather difficult if he should chance to ask tiresome questions. She looked out of the window at the rain that was still pouring down, heavy and straight; it made a continuous, drubbing noise outside on a row of kerosene

oil tins that had been collected by Sophia to serve later on as flower pots, when she should have time to paint them green or red.

"My dear daughter," Mr. Williams began earnestly, "I am sincerely glad you are happy in your engagement. And you must not think me interfering, but, as your mother's husband, I feel I stand in the position of a father to you; I suppose this young man will not object to granting me an interview regarding the business aspect of the matter—as to the provision he is able to make for you? I understand that you have a little money of your own, and I feel that it would only be my duty to remind him that that sum should be secured to you absolutely."

"I am sure you will find him quite willing to agree to whatever you may suggest," she said with inward amusement. "As it happens he is not quite in the same circumstances as the ordinary army man in the line. He came into a large fortune not long ago and is very rich indeed."

Anne felt that it was really disgusting of her to enjoy her step-father's astonishment, for Mr. Williams undoubtedly was taken aback. The fact of Dion's wealth had never reached his ears; he heard little of the Station news or gossip, and, indeed, he hardly even knew Captain Devasse by sight. Mary and Sophia had spoken of him as an old friend of Anne's, and beyond that he had never given the man a thought.

He waited a moment, realising what she had told him.

"That is well, I suppose—from a worldly point of view—but wealth is a great responsibility, a grave trust. Try to use it rightly, child. I hope your future husband is as good as he is wealthy."

"He is a good man," said Anne still staring out at the rain, "and I think," she added softly, "since I have been here I have learnt a great deal that will make me see things differently. I hope we shall not live entirely for ourselves."

Mr. Williams gave her a quick glance. Did the words come from her heart, or were they merely prompted by her fatal desire to please? Then he saw tears in Anne's brown eyes—and felt remorse for his suspicion. And, indeed, this time she had spoken but the truth.

"Remember, too," he went on, "marriage is a very solemn step in life, not to be entered upon lightly or without certainty of love on both sides. You may think, perhaps, that because I am a missionary, and because I am an old man, I cannot speak with human sympathy on the subject; but my child, I myself have suffered. I know what I am talking about. I loved your dear mother with the whole strength and passion of my heart, just as she, poor soul, had loved your father and—as she could never love me! We were happy together and our affection was warm and true—but," he paused, "we both suffered! Anne!" he raised his voice a little,

for the noise of the rain on the tins outside seemed louder than ever, "you believe that this man loves you—are you *sure* that you love him? However rich he may be, whatever he may be able to offer you, I implore you do not marry him unless you are confident that you would choose him only as your husband from the whole world of men—because you love him!"

Anne turned to her step-father; his voice, his words, his sincerity touched her deeply. At the moment she could almost have told him everything; have cried out to him to save her from herself—from becoming Dion's wife with a lie on her lips and a lie in her heart; have confessed to him that could she follow her true instinct there was but one man, of all men living, that she would choose as her husband—and that man was not Dion Devasse!

Then, with the self-control that had been part of her training from babyhood, she suppressed the wave of emotion that surged within her. She had her goal to reach; a goal that, without question, was worth the reaching! She would not swerve, would not allow sentiment to rob her of her hard-earned prize—for what?—for the sake of a foolish infatuation that could lead only to distress and desolation. . . . She was nothing to Oliver Wray, nothing that signified. All that really mattered to him was his work, his religion. His battle with idolatry was the passion of his life; and even did he think of her with any feeling of tenderness

he would spurn it from him, crush it, as a thing that might claim no part in the way that he had chosen —the way of self-sacrifice. Quick!—she must arm herself with her own weapons of guile and hypocrisy to overcome the magnetic, disturbing power of truth and faith that breathed from this honest old man! She looked into the steadfast, rugged face, on a level with her own, and threw an infinity of feeling and convincement into her voice and demeanour.

"Dear—*Father!*" she said, and gave him her slender, delicate hands, "be happy about me! I am happy about myself—I do assure you. I love Dion Devasse truly, faithfully, with all my heart."

The words came clear and distinct; and in the little, meaning silence that followed, Anne felt herself forced to look round.

Oliver Wray was standing in the middle of the room. His face was white, his mouth set—and there was something in his eyes that turned Anne cold and faint with a sudden, hopeless understanding.

"Ah, Wray!" Mr. Williams exclaimed, anxious to save what seemed to him a slightly awkward situation—though, after all, he reflected with a smile, Anne's engagement would soon be no secret —"You came in by the back veranda, and we never heard you; the rain is making such a noise outside on those horrid tins of Sophia's!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE time that must elapse before Anne could leave Sika seemed to stretch itself before her like a wide river, deep and dangerous. To cross it would be difficult; to reach safety on the other side would entail care, and skill, and determination. But she was convinced that, once away from the Mission House, away from Sika, out of India, she would find herself free from this uneasiness of soul; she would be able to set her mind in order, and regain her old attitude towards existence, to obtain relief and consolation in her former element and surroundings. Then only, she was confident, would contentment be restored to her; happiness would be hers again in her success; in her prosperous future, in the applause and recognition of the world to which she belonged and was returning.

So Anne passed the days nervously, feverishly, filling every hour as best she could contrive. She got up after Mr. Williams and Sophia had gone out. Then she rode or drove with Dion, after he was free from parade, late into the mornings, timing her return that she might find the Mission House breakfast over and the bungalow empty. She spent entire afternoons with the wives of Dion's brother officers, for many friendly advances were made towards her now that the engagement was known;

and she responded readily to them as giving her a valid excuse for frequent absence. She even paid a visit of a week to the Stapelys, enduring Babba's society, and his mother's uninteresting confidences concerning servants, bazaar prices, the amount of milk given by the cows, and the proportion she suspected that the cow-man was stealing; also the continual tribulation over dusters and kitchen cloths.

"My dear," Mrs. Stapely assured Anne in solemn distress, "I am positively *obliged* to lock up the dirty cloths every day in a tin box, or there wouldn't be one left by the time they go to the wash! It's the only way to keep them."

Anne was present, by accident, one Monday morning at the opening of the tin box in question; and she decided that were she in Mrs. Stapely's place she would prefer to be robbed of every house cloth she possessed rather than suffer such an olfactory ordeal!

Anne was not only making strenuous efforts to fill up her time, she was also purposely avoiding Oliver Wray; and he himself rendered this more easy to her. When he knew she was at home he did not go to the Mission House, except to interview Mr. Williams in his study. After school duties were over he would spend extra hours at work in the district, or preaching and teaching in the city; for he, too, was restless and unhappy, he also looked with painful eagerness for the day of Anne's departure, the day when this stately girl

whose presence so troubled his peace, who had brought such a disturbing element into his life, should pass from his sight completely. Things might be easier then. He would be stronger—better able to fight and conquer the terrible distraction that forced itself between him and the cause to which he was pledged body and soul.

The words he had heard Anne utter to her stepfather, her earnest declaration of love for the man she was to marry, had brought him a certain relief —bitter though it had been to him at the moment; had dispelled the torturing fear that had shaken him only a few hours previously as they stood together in the veranda—as they turned silently and at the same moment from each other's eyes. The certainty that he was suffering alone gave him a sense of support and courage, and with renewed and more desperate ardour he had flung himself into the vortex of his work. He barely rested; he gave himself no leisure; his days and nights were one long strain.

And especially did he occupy his mind with the position of Ramanund. Several times since Anne had surprised the Brahmin youth in the Padre's bungalow had the boy contrived to visit Wray by subterfuge and stealth, disguised as the meanest coolie, that he might learn more of the Western conception and application of the teaching of Christ —might understand more fully the spirit of a religion that influenced life and conduct, for those

who truly followed it, to the exclusion of all base and sensual elements—a creed that valued practice before observance.

The fact of Ramanund's visits to him being accomplished only by an elaborate system of deception —a system in which the boy took a curious racial pleasure as being a triumph of intrigue—gave Wray matter for serious perplexity. He felt that it was not right to countenance or encourage these clandestine interviews; and yet, what other hope had Ramanund of acquiring the knowledge for which he thirsted—the knowledge that alone could lead him to apply charity and goodness to his daily life? It was not to baptise him, or convert him at once to objective Christianity that Wray looked forward in the immediate future. It was to instil into his heart the principles of right and wrong that would manifest themselves in the young man's conduct as originating in the example of the Saviour. Wray had no wish to separate him from his family, to cause discord, strife, misery; he only desired that Ramanund should illustrate by his own behaviour the influence of the teaching he had sought so voluntarily. And perchance with time through him, his people might be brought to recognise the difference between the demands of idolatry and the guidance of Christianity, and so be induced to tolerate, if not to admit, the fact that the faith of the Christians was the faith of truth, and light, and understanding.

Remonstrance with Ramanund on the subject of his visits produced no effect. "What can be done?" he argued in reply, as Wray himself had argued. "How otherwise could I speak with thee?"

"All the same it is not sound," maintained the missionary; while Ramanund, happy and at ease with his English friend, squatted on the floor wrapped in his coolie blanket, his slender, brown limbs bare, a disreputable puggaree on his head.

"Without doubt," he continued, "I can read the Book and think on its writings for myself, since this last one has not yet been stolen from me; do I not always hide it within my garments?" he touched caressingly the volume that lay open on the floor beside him. "Nevertheless there is much written within it that I do not understand; and if I may not ask for the meaning how shall I find it?"

"Would it truly be impossible for me to come and see you sometimes? How can your father prevent your receiving visitors?"

Wray had made the suggestion more than once, but the answer had always been the same—a shrug of the shoulders, a mournful smile, and "Come and try!"

"Let me write to you then."

Ramanund threw out his hands,—"I should not get the letters. Maybe one would reach me, maybe I could send one in return. After that?—there could be no more letters.

It was a puzzling situation, and the missionary felt strongly that some definite action should be taken. He meant to continue the fight, he meant to do all in his power to help and rescue this searching soul; but how was he to carry on the work he had begun?

Next day he sought the advice of Mr. Williams. "You can do nothing," was the veteran's verdict. "I agree with you that these secret meetings should cease, but I do not see how else you are to instruct the boy unless you can persuade him to come forward boldly and proclaim his desire to be taught. Certainly you would not be permitted to visit him as a friend at the fort. They would receive you, and receive you politely, I know, though the Rajah would wash his hands almost before your back was turned! I have been to call there myself at rare intervals. But you would get no further than a visit of ceremony. We can only hope and pray that the seed you undoubtedy have sown may be allowed to spring up and influence the young man's character for good, even though he remain an idolater in name to the end."

"Shall we never get any further with the higher castes?" Wray said hopelessly. "It seems to me that as long as our converts are drawn only from the lower people we have no hope of impressing the well-born class."

Mr. Williams sighed. "In no country in the world has Christianity such a hard fight as in In-

dia. We can only press on and do our best, and be thankful that we can touch some classes, however humble; and remember, Wray, our Lord was ever the friend of the humble, the lowly, and the oppressed! The root of the whole difficulty, of course, is caste. It is almost an impassable barrier. The case of this young Ramanund is an example of its iron tyranny."

Wray pondered and prayed continually over the matter. At one time he was inclined to endeavour to persuade Ramanund to profess Christianity boldly. But then again he felt that the lad was not ready; and there was also the danger that he might agree to the step more from the desire to be rid of irksome ties and restrictions than from actual and genuine conviction. In any case Wray determined to tell him, when next he came, that it must be for the last time; and he would also urge him to be honest with his father the Rajah, and demand bravely to be allowed liberty of mind and action.

But the days passed and no pretended "coolie" came tapping at the window of Wray's sitting-room; and the missionary found himself listening for the sound with nervous expectation night after night as he sat up over his books and papers and reports.

Various explanations of his pupil's silence troubled his mind. Had Ramanund grown weary of his studies, and so fallen back, weakly, into the old manner of thought? Had he yielded to custom and prejudice and given up the strife? or had the Rajah

discovered the visits and taken measures to stop them? Wray recalled Mr. Stapely's words:—"I'm afraid Master Ramanund's kickings may only land him in disaster." What could they do to the boy? Almost anything, perhaps, rather than permit him to break his caste! The silence made the padre very uneasy. He had become deeply interested in this gentle youth whose nature held such possibilities for good, hampered though it was by the ancient heritage of idolatry and self-indulgence.

Anxiety, added to the soreness of his heart, prevented Wray from concentrating his thoughts, kept him from devoting his full attention to his city work, and so made it the harder for him to shut Anne's image from his mind. He was oppressed by a sense of awful solitude; his energy, his method, his enthusiasm, seemed to be failing him when he needed them most; he was unsettled, over-strained. And it was all so doubly harassing to him just now, when the busiest time of the month was upon him; when, the moon being at its full, the river was specially sacred, and larger crowds than usual of pilgrims, beggars, and wandering priests poured into the city to bathe and worship on the auspicious night. And on this night it was usually Wray's custom to preach on the steps of the principal bathing place, compelling an audience by the force of his zeal, his eloquence, his vigour, and the earnest devotion of his bearing. Probably his listeners were also attracted by the eager pose of his

dark head, thrown back, bare to the moonlight, as he delivered his message; in shape it was not unlike the heads of some of their own high-caste Brahmin priests whom they so feared and venerated. Also there was something that drew them in the peculiar effect of his eyes that glittered like polished steel beneath his dark eyebrows. Here, without question, was a holy man, and it was a pity that he should belong to the unclean race, and was not a Brahmin; but apparently he preached a religion that was only another form of their own, and, after all, there were many roads to Heaven!

Over a late and hurried breakfast this morning Wray tried to keep his mind intent on the words he meant to say some ten hours hence down by the river side. To-night it was full moon; and also was it the date of some minor religious festival which had brought together a number of devotees from various out-lying shrines and temples. Wray had seen a procession of them this morning winding along the streets towards the bathing steps—loathsome creatures, their almost nude bodies smeared with clay or ashes, some with limbs distorted, and bodies emaciated to skeletons, some intoxicated with drugs; all hideous, grotesque, filthy, from their long, matted hair to their naked feet. He remembered them now, and sickened at the thought of a faith that could produce such abominations. What could he do?—what could he say to make his message felt and heard in the face of this

terrible power of evil? It was hopeless, hopeless —he might just as well have lived as other men, taken what was his own in the world, perhaps have been able to win Anne Crivener as his wife; for surely he must have met her and loved her wherever the road of his existence might have led him! Then he pushed away his food and started up from the table ashamed and aghast at his own cowardice. With clenched hands, and set lips, he passed quickly into the other room to seek courage and forgiveness on his knees.

A few minutes later there crept into the little veranda an old native with close-cropped, white moustache and whiskers, shaven head bound with a wisp of grimy puggaree, a cataract in one eye, and lean, twisted limbs, who sat himself down in a corner and demanded with hoarse persistence to speak with the sahib. The sahib alone, he declared, could give him advice concerning the cure of his sick grandson.

In vain did Wray's servant assert that his master was no "doctor-padre sahib," and point out to him the way to the hospital. The visitor refused to listen. He had been told, he said, that the sahib who lived in the little bungalow within the walls of the Mission compound was the only sahib who could tell him of the cure he sought; and he would sit in this veranda till the padre-sahib came forth, even should it be necessary to sit until to-morrow.

"Wah! thou art a wooden owl!" said the old

sērvant in deep disgust; and, as he went unwillingly to summon his master, he quoted a proverb applicable to those who will not harken to reason: "Truly, his ears be stuffed with wax."

Wray came out at once; and, while the bearer still lingered within earshot, the patriarch launched into loud details concerning the state of his grandson's digestion, to which the padre listened in puzzled patience. But, the moment they were alone, the quavering, high-pitched voice sank to a hurried undertone.

"Sahib, these are words for thine ears only. Listen: *The disciple sendeth loving greetings to the master. He may come no more to the master's dwelling for the reason that the visits of the disciple are betrayed, and are prevented. He is full of sorrow. But he will forget not the teaching of the master.* That is the message. Given were the words to this slave only through much danger and backsheesh and cunning, and moreover. . . ."

At that moment the bearer bustled out again into the veranda to deliver a note on a salad plate that represented a salver.

"From Der-aper Sahib," he announced, and scowled at the importunate caller because he still squatted on the floor and had not risen in the sahib's presence. The old man forthwith began to whine blessings on the padre's head for the counsel he had given in regard to the treatment of the grandson. Then the shrunken figure struggled up-

right with grunts and groans, and tottered off across the compound; and Wray stood looking after it, Mr. Draper's letter unopened in his hand. He was realising, slowly, that Ramanund was now lost to him definitely.

The simple message went to the missionary's heart, but the sentence "he will forget not the tēaching of the master" gave him a wistful hope, a hope that leavened a little the tumult of pity, regret, and helpless yearning stirred up in his breast by the old man's tidings. Ramanund's delicate, wheaten-coloured face rose up before him; it seemed to Wray that the soft, melancholy eyes gazed on him with reproach, that despair, tragedy, lookēd out from their liquid depths; and with a sudden, tearing shock he became conscious that he had not taken his chance of sending back an answer!

He ran, hatless, to the gate. "Old man!" he criēd. "Hi, old man!"

But he was too late. There was no one on the road but a Hindu village woman and her two children. She covered her face coyly with her wrapper as the Englishman appeared, and collided with a trēe in consequence; while the children set up a dismal howl of terror. The messenger had disappeared completely. Over-wrought and unhinged as he was, it seemed to Wray the climax to Fate's cruelty; and a desperatē impulse impelled him to hurry to the stables and order his trap to be got ready at once. He must go out to Thanesur;

must endeavour by bribery, stratagem, by any sort of means, to communicate with Ramanund, to send the boy if only one word of encouragement and sympathy. Failing all else he would call on the Rajah boldly, so that at least "the disciple" might hear, however, indirectly, that his friend had come to the fort, and so feel that his message had been understood. . . .

While the pony was being harnessed he went over to the Mission House to tell Mr. Williams what had happened; but the old missionary was away in a distant village till the evening, and Tabitha, who was in the back veranda pretending to hem dusters, came out and said that "Sophia-Miss" was visiting in the bazaar. Only "Ker-inner Miss-sahib" was in the bungalow, "very busy, packing boxes, going to England in three-four days."

Wray hastened back to the little bungalow; and soon he had driven through the bazaar and its outskirts, and was on the broad white road that would lead him to Thanesur.

The sharp crispness of the cold weather was still in the air; but it had not long to last. Another month at the most and the sun would grow daily more determined, the weeks warmer with a rapidly increasing heat, until the west wind arose, fierce and dry, to parch, wither, and scorch all that it swept. Even now the early afternoon sun was unpleasantly powerful and made the shadow of the great trees on either side most welcome; not that

Wray heeded the sun or the glare, for his thoughts rendered him insensible to physical considerations. He was only anxious to find himself near enough to the fort to grasp at the first opportunity that might present itself of conveying some message to the unhappy youth who was practically a prisoner within its walls. He urged his little mare to a faster pace, but was obliged to pull her up and draw to the side of the road a few minutes later, for a thick, noisy cloud of dust was whirling towards him. Was it an English riding party? he wondered vaguely; or a native marriage procession, or a herd of cattle? Then out of the moving yellow mist emerged a pair of white horses with long manes and tails, pink nostrils and wall eyes, dragging a clumsy barouche, driven by a native coachman in gaudy livery. Surely the Rajah! Wray's heart gave a bound of anticipation. If Ramanund were with his father, it would, perhaps, be possible to signal friendship and comprehension; if not, there might be some chance of obtaining access to the boy in the Rajah's absence. The heavy, rumbling vehicle came on, all dust, and rattle, and glitter, regardless of other travellers on the road, attended by fierce-looking outriders armed with antiquated weapons, and dressed in uniform that was brilliant to extreme as far as the knee; below that, it could only have been described as squalid.

The cavalcade swept past the missionary in a flash of colour, giving the impression of a convey-

ance overloaded with people in gorgeous raiment, velvet and satin, gold and jewels; people with impassive bronze faces, and dark, languid eyes. A wave of musky perfume brushed the Englishman's face as he stared through the haze of dust in search of a familiar countenance. It was there. Seated beside his father was Ramanund, and Wray observed with concern that the boy looked ill, tired, despondent.

Opposite the Rajah and his son were seated two fat replicas of Rampal Singh—his half-brothers; and between them was wedged Krishna, wizened, alert, malignant, hunched up like an old brown monkey, clad in a royal-blue velvet coat. At once the old man's keen eyes detected the missionary waiting in his little cart at the side of the road. Leaning forward he said a few rapid words to his master who merely made a gesture of disdain.

But Ramanund started and turned his head, and in an instant his eyes were illuminated with joyful surprise and recognition. In the same instant the missionary smiled at him with meaning—and made the sign of the cross.

The carriage passed on with its gaily-clothed passengers, and its pomp and noise, enveloped in a veil of dust; and Wray waited till the clatter of harness, the roll of wheels and the beat of hoofs, had died in the distance. He recognised that the carriage-load was on its way to the river; and he wondered why he had not before considered the probability

of meeting it—for the House of Thanesur was invariably represented at every religious gathering.

Then he turned the pony's head, and began the return journey. He was relieved because he had seen, and, he hoped, reassured Ramanund that the latter's message had been received safely, and understood; yet it had further saddened and dispirited him to view the boy on his way, however unwillingly, to the performance of idolatrous worship. He now felt, acutely, the reaction from the strain of distress and excitement; he was wearily conscious that rest was yet very far off; and suddenly the sun seemed very hot. As he took his handkerchief from his pocket to wipe his forehead and clear the dust from his eyes, Mr. Draper's note, still unopened, came with it and fell between his feet to the bottom of the trap.

He opened the letter listlessly as he drove along. It was to ask for some special information, which Wray happened to be in the best position to give, concerning a school matter. In a postscript Mr. Draper hoped that his dear friend might be able to find time to reply, at length, before he started for the bazaar that evening.

Wray returned the letter to his pocket, and his spirits rose; for the postscript had recalled to his mind the work that lay before him that night. His lassitude left him; now he felt only a burning avidity for the hour to arrive when he should be standing on the bathing steps, in the radiance of the

moonlight, to cry his Heaven-sent tidings, to make the Divine promise heard, to preach deliverance and salvation to a deluded people sunk in the horrors of idolatry, to dominate and impress them with the power of the Truth he had to tell—"a voice crying in the wilderness!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE moon rose large and luminous over the city of temples, and flung her golden glitter across the sacred stream like a vast searchlight, to reveal a multitude of worshippers that moved perpetually in and out of the healing waters of forgiveness. Crowds of figures swarmed on the broad flights of steps that met the river all along the city face, a clamorous throng swayed by religious energy and tense excitement, urged to more strenuous devoutness by the call of the priests, the hypnotic throbbing of drums and gongs, the ceaseless hum of "Ram! Ram!" on every side. There was to be no rest throughout these hours of worship.

At the head of the broadest and most densely covered flight of steps, Oliver Wray stood against a background of towering masonry. Clear and high his voice re-echoed from the massive walls, and rang down through the concourse of people ascending and descending. One hand was held upraised; his face was set with indomitable purpose, entranced with spiritual exaltation. He felt his soul aflame. Barely was he conscious of material existence; even the sound of his own impassioned voice, uttering words that a mysterious inner force impelled from his lips, seemed detached, to reach

ears externally, as did the other sounds about im. He was sensible only of the divine, inward uth and meaning of what he stood there to pro- aim.

He saw, passing and repassing in the moonlight, as though dreamlike and unreal, rapt faces of Brahmin priests; repulsive figures of devotees of various sects; simple, anxious groups of villagers being jostled by more experienced city folk; bands of peasant women who clung to each other, chanting minor melodies that had curious quavers and abrupt, effective pauses.

Clusters of people, from whose bodies and clothing came mingled odours of musk and garlic, spice and sandalwood, pressed around him with faces that expressed either passive curiosity or questioning interest. They melted away to be replaced by others, and now and again a mendicant monk would stand before the white priest and lift up his voice in argument or contradiction, only to pass on with a display of contemptuous indifference to the rejoinder. Otherwise there was little opposition or interference; and presently Wray moved further down the steps to where the crowd was thickest.

Now, at intervals, the noise, the smell, the incessant movement, combined with the strain of his purpose, made him dizzy. He felt cold, too, and very tired. But he preached on steadfastly, and many stopped on their way to or from the water, to listen to his words with tolerant attention. But

after a time there came an interruption. Shouts were heard at the top of the bathing steps. Something was coming down, something was carving a way through the throng with determined, arrogant progress. It was the Rajah of Thanesur with his suite and his attendant priests, descending to the river to bathe, so to become pure and sinless, protected from disaster and disease by the approval of the gods.

Wray was swept aside from the path of the procession, among the helpless, huddling mass of people; and, therefore, he caught but a glimpse of the cortège, just the severe profiles of the priests, the bobbing turbans of the Rajah and his companions among which he thought, with sore regret, he could distinguish the white head-dress of Ramanund. Then, quite at the end of the little column, as the crowd spread itself again, released from the pressure, he saw a bent, shrivelled figure that hobbled along with abnormal activity, glancing quickly from right to left as though in search of some particular individual. Wray knew who it was. Often had Ramanund described, with hatred, the Machiavellian old creature whose evil influence was the curse of the Thanesur rule.

Krishna also espied Wray; saw him standing, a conspicuous figure in his Western clothing, against the nebulous native setting; and the old man's quick black eyes glinted with a cunning triumph. He made a low, mocking salaam to the English

padre; and at the same time he spat ostentatiously, and with unmistakable intention, on the ground—a mark of insult the entire significance of which can only be realised by those who are familiar with the East.

The Englishman started forward. A hot flush of passion seethed suddenly through his veins and up into his brain. He fought hard to control it. He strove to still the furious throbbing of his pulses. But it was as if all the spiritual ecstasy and endeavour of the past hours were swept aside in one sharp moment by some evil spirit, terrible and strong. He put his hand to his head, and tried to pray. And as he wrestled with the frenzy that had laid its hold upon him, there shot into his mind, confusedly, the scene of his first meeting with Anne Crivener. He remembered how wildly angry he had felt then on her account; he remembered the eyes of the natives about her as she went through the narrow street with such careless confidence; and again the paroxysm of anger shook him violently, and he clenched his hands and held them down, lest he should dash them into the dark faces that moved to and fro before him.

He turned to go up the steps, to make his way through the people; and all at once the devil of anger went out from him like a fire suddenly extinguished, and left him with a sick exhaustion of mind and body; he only feared that he might faint before he could reach the top. . . . Ah! the

crowd was parting again. What a relief! Before him, like a sloping ladder, rose a narrow way, clear to the buildings. He stepped into the middle of it, and began to stumble upwards. Surely a figure was standing at the top, waiting for him. A white figure. Who was it? The moonlight must have grown thick and misty, for he could not see clearly; but a conviction came to him, with sudden rapture, that it was Anne! Yes, now he could see her. Anne in her soft white gown, with her proud little head, her bright hair, and the gay marigolds blazing at her breast. She was waiting for him—for *him;* holding out her hands. He must make haste. She was alone up there among these evil-minded idolaters.

A native police-constable, in blue and red uniform, pushed his way to the padre's side and spoke to him, pointing upwards; then tried to pull him back into the crowd.

"It is all right," Wray answered impatiently. "I am hurrying to her. She cannot come down here."

He wrenched himself free from the policeman's detaining hand, and went on up the steps with a spurt of strength. Yet it seemed to take a long time. He felt as if he were climbing stairs in a nightmare—going so fast, yet making no progress! —and Anne was waiting. . . .

"I am coming!" he called, "I am coming."

Then suddenly he was at the top, and Anne, with her smiling eyes, and her white gown, and the marigolds at her breast—was gone!

He was face to face with a wild-looking fakir of unusual height, whose eyes burned with an unholy excitement produced by a deadly drug; whose thick hair, many feet long and matted with cow-dung, was piled up on his head in fantastic shape; whose gaunt, powerful body looked white as snow in the moonlight, for it was plastered with clay and ashes. Necklaces of beads, and festoons of marigolds, hung down below his waist; and one arm, withered and fixed, was held high in the air, the nails protruding like claws through the back of the clenched hand. And behind him pressed a crowd of similar faces and forms, grotesque, loathsome, very incarnations of evil. . . .

The repulsive picture seemed to whirl high above the missionary's head, and the fever that had been on him, though disregarded, for the past few hours, reached the limit of human bearance. He fell insensible at the feet of the clay-bedaubed figure.

The constable, a zealous person lately promoted, had followed the padre-sahib up the steps, shouting at the same time to the leaders of the fakir band to delay their wild rush, in preparation for which the way had been cleared down to the water. His subsequent boast that in this manner he had, without doubt, preserved the life of the sahib was prob-

ably a true one, for Wray, rendered irresponsible by fever, must have been knocked backwards and trampled underfoot by the human torrent.

It was also the constable who, using his official authority, commandeered a palanquin that was waiting for its owner, a fat grain merchant, to come up from the river, and placed the unconscious figure of the missionary within it. Then he escorted his charge without hesitation to the Civil Surgeon's house, which lay a considerable distance from the city; for, though the policeman knew the padre by sight, and was aware that he lived in the Mission compound, he considered it wiser, under the circumstances, to deal only with a sahib in Government service. He was anxious that his promptness and solicitude in this predicament of the padre-sahib's should become known to those in power. Besides, missionaries were a puzzling caste. Apparently they were not exactly real sahibs, since the Government did not pay them, or give them peons, or any travelling allowance, or offices to write in; and there was no saying what they might do if he took their "brother" back to them in this plight. Being poor, they might even endeavour in some way or another to fasten the blame of it all on himself—in order to escape giving him backsheesh as a reward for all his trouble and inconvenience.

So it came about that nothing was known at the Mission House of Wray's illness till the next morning. His servant had been told not to wait

up for him, and Mr. Williams would naturally suppose that his young colleague had gone straight back to his bungalow when the work on the bathing steps was done.

Soon after daylight a note arrived from the doctor for the senior missionary, who left the house quietly without disturbing Anne or Sophia, taking Wray's servant with him; but the bearer of the note had, of course, imparted the news to the compound, and Tabitha carried it in to the house with the early tea.

Sophia heard it first. She rushed to Anne's room in her red flannel dressing gown, and found her step-sister still asleep. Even concerned and excited as she was, she could not but note with tender pleasure the charm of the slumbering face on the pillow—the ruffled, warmly-shaded hair, the rose-flushed skin, the little, silent smile on the lips. Sophia stood, irresolute, by the bedside; reluctant to awaken this sleeping beauty.

Anne was dreaming again, as she had so often dreamed since the night of her mother's death, that she was wandering among the ruins at Thanesur. Generally she was afraid, bewildered, distressed; but this time she was not alone, and she felt a serene gladness, for Oliver Wray was at her side. And it was all enchanting. They were amid hot sunshine, and aromatic scents that drifted across to them from the opening blossoms on big trees; the battered tower seemed to sleep; the ruins lay in

warm tranquillity. She revelled in the silence and the grand, sleepy melancholy of the place. The presence of her companion transformed it all for her into the fairest outlook. . . . She dreamed she had asked him some question and was waiting for him to turn and answer her. She longed that he should look round; she was impatient to meet his eyes, to see in them the light of love and happiness.

Instead, she was awakened suddenly; and there was Sophia standing by the bed in her dreadful red dressing-gown, patting her shoulder, and telling her something in a quick, anxious voice. How unalluring she looked, poor thing! with her rat's tail of hair, and the thick, longcloth nightdress showing at her throat and wrists.

"What *is* the matter?" inquired Anne, in cross sleepiness. But when she understood she sat upright—the colour gone from her cheeks, her eyes wide open.

"I'm afraid he must be very bad if they took him to the Civil Surgeon's," said Sophia with a sob. "I wish father would come back, that we might know how he is and exactly what happened. It seems very hard if he is to be called, when he can so ill be spared; but we all know that he is ready to go home—he is——"

"For goodness sake *stop*, Sophia!" cried Anne desperately. "I will not have you say such awful things! He is not going to die."

"But, Annie dear, how can you tell?" expostu-

lated Sophia, in astonishment at what appeared to her almost irreverent assurance. "If it is God's will——"

"I am going to dress," Anne interrupted. "You had better go and do the same."

Snubbed and mystified, Sophia retreated. Sometimes Anne puzzled her very much. It seemed to her curious that Anne was not more upset about poor Mr. Wray's breakdown; they had always appeared to be such excellent friends; but then, of course, Anne had only known him a short time, and it could not mean the same thing to her. . . .

But had Sophia been aware of it, Anne, the heartless, was at that moment crying grievously, and her tears were the more painful because Anne hardly ever cried. She might have enumerated each separate occasion on which she had wept in her adult life, had it been required of her.

Now she gave way in helpless misery. She felt a despairing loneliness, for she could no longer fight against the truth. She loved this man, who, perhaps, lay dying; and destiny had wrecked her life! Of what avail was all her self-reliance, her worldly wisdom, her contempt of sentiment, on which she had so prided herself? All her armour of pride, and egoism, and ambition had fallen away from her, shattered into pieces, leaving her unprotected, defenceless, weak.

She began to dress with trembling haste. Against the wall her boxes stood open, some ready,

some but half-packed. In three days she was to start for Bombay. On the dressing-table lay the little black-and-white box, made of porcupine quills, that she had brought out for her mother. Mr. Williams had given it back to her, with its contents. The sight of it raised within her mind a vision of herself as she had been when she unpacked the little memento in this room, comparatively so short a time ago. Then, she was light-hearted, eager, engrossed in the pursuit of her own prosperity, callous to everything but her own convenience. Now—where was her appetite for the future? Could she ever feel the same again? Would she ever be able to still this terrible ache in her heart?

She forced back her tears in wild resentment against her lot, and struggled to regain her power over her feelings. The old spirit of defiance fought hard for recognition and mastery. . . . But through all the mental distress and confusion she was conscious only of two things clearly—a dominating, poignant anxiety for the return of Mr. Williams, that she might know whether Oliver Wray was to live or die; and a thankfulness that Dion was occupied with a field day.

When, at last, the old buggy jolted up to the front of the house Anne was outwardly calm, and no trace of tears or emotion showed itself in her face. Sophia ran to meet her father on the steps.

"Oh!" she cried, "we have been longing for you to come back. We know something of what

has happened, and we have been so anxious. Tabitha brought in the bad news. How is he?"

Mr. Williams came into the veranda and threw his melon-shaped hat on to the table. How slowly he walked, and how grave he looked! Anne turned cold.

"The doctor thinks it may be typhoid," he said, "but, on the other hand, it may only be a severe attack of ordinary fever. He can't tell yet."

"But if it was typhoid," Sophia suggested hopefully, "he would have been seedy for some time before he got so bad, wouldn't he? Don't you remember ten years ago when I had typhoid——"

"I don't think he *has* been quite himself lately," Mr. Williams said, not attending to Sophia's reminiscences, "and, of course, that might account for it. Anyway, we shall know in the next few days. He is to stay where he is for the present. If it is only fever, Dr. Stevens says he will be able to move quite soon, and real nursing won't be required. If it is typhoid, he will telegraph for a trained nurse from the nearest headquarters to help Mrs. Stevens. It was, perhaps, fortunate, if it is to be a very bad case, that the constable took him straight to the Civil Surgeon's house, though it was rather an odd thing for the man to have done—he must have remembered whereabouts the missionaries live, even if he did not know Wray's own bungalow."

"I wonder if there is anything we can do—or send him?" Sophia said anxiously, "though you

may be sure Mrs. Stevens will look after him well. She is the kindest old person in the world. I don't know how many young fellows she hasn't pulled through serious illnesses. Not that she is really so *old,*" Sophia corrected herself truthfully, "but she gives one that impression. She is so motherly, and sensible, and firm, and of such a homely appearance.

A curious relief stole into Anne's mind, first because there was a woman to minister to the fever-stricken man, and secondly, because that woman apparently was neither young nor good-looking! She realised the pettiness of the last reason with a sense of disgust with herself and her own unworthy feeling.

When Mr. Williams had gone inside, followed by Sophia still recalling events of the time when she herself had suffered from typhoid, Anne stayed out in the veranda. From where she stood, leaning against one of the pillars, she could see Oliver Wray's silent, deserted little bungalow shining white and square in the strong sunlight, and her mind reviewed slowly all the details of her intercourse with the man—every word he had said to her, every look and smile he had given her. Why, she asked herself in bitter rebellion, should this thing have happened to her? What was love that it should overtake people without warning or consideration, to bring into some lives delight and sunshine, to bring despair and misery to others.

If it had not been for her meeting with Oliver

Wray how victoriously happy she might have felt at this moment—starting in three days for England, for London!—going back to the easy days of modern comfort and enjoyment, everything within her reach that could spell success and good fortune. and now it would be all grey and tasteless, drained of its pleasure, poisoned by memories and the aching sense of something for ever missed and unattainable.

A deadly depression weighed upon her. She stood there without moving, her hands clasped listlessly before her. The kerosene-oil tins, now painted red and green alternately, stood in a row at her feet; they were already filled with earth, and she wondered vaguely what would come up in them. She would never know. And after three days she would never again see the little white bungalow, or the Mission House with its creepers climbing up the trelliswork, or the yellow compound relieved only by Sophia's pathetic patch of garden. It seemed strange to remember how anxious she had been to leave it all, when now she yearned to stay—to stay if only till she could know that Oliver Wray was to recover—till she had seen him once more to say good-bye.

For a moment she pressed her hands over her eyes; then flung herself from the support of the pillar. She felt she could have screamed; could have beaten her forehead on the ground; could have done anything that was violent to ease her wretched-

ness. . . . Some distraction must be found; time must be occupied or she could never bear the hours. . . .

Suddenly she remembered that she had promised Mrs. Stapely a legacy of several pretty trifles of lace and trimming, and a couple of hats that had not been worn. She would take the things to her at once and, by this means, at least a portion of the day would be consumed; also at the Judge's bungalow she might possibly hear later news of Wray's condition.

She ordered the grey Arab to be saddled for, since her formal engagement, the pony had been kept in the Mission stables at Captain Devasse's expense. Then she started, regardless of the strength of the midday sun, even welcoming almost savagely the heat and the glare; and the groom followed her, under protest, carrying the box that contained her parting gifts to Mrs. Stapely.

It struck Anne, as she arrived under the porch, that the house seemed curiously quiet. She could see no peons on duty, Mrs. Stapely was not giving shrill orders in the back premises. There were no evidences of Babba's presence save a monstrous paper kite that was balanced against the wall—doubtless in anticipation of the coming season of kite-flying, such a favourite native pastime. The syce ran round the bungalow shouting, and returned with a sulky announcement that "there was nobody." Anne dismounted and went inside the house.

The rooms were all deserted; but presently, through one of the windows, she saw a little crowd of people emerging from the plantation of fruit trees at the further end of the garden—the peons in their smart uniform, the house servants in their long coats and large white puggarees, the more humble members of the staff straggling behind. All were talking and gesticulating in evident excitement.

Someone came quickly into the veranda, and as Anne hurried out she met Mrs. Stapely, hatless, agitated, in tearful distress.

"Oh! I am so thankful to see you," she cried, and held out both hands to Anne, "Babba has done such an awful thing, and now he has run away and hidden himself because he was so frightened, poor little son! We've just searched the fruit-garden. We can't find him anywhere."

She ran into the drawing-room and began to peer beneath chairs and sofas, and behind curtains and screens.

"I've looked in all the rooms already," she said, as Anne joined in the hunt, "but he might have crept in since. Where *can* he be?"

"What did he do that was so terrible?" Anne inquired.

Mrs. Stapely wrung her hands. "He threw his father's book down the garden well! The book Griff was writing about crime among the Hindoos. It was a mass of manuscript and notes all tied together in bundles, and of course it has gone to the

bottom, and the well is so deep, and then while we were trying to get it out Babba ran away—what *shall* I do! Griffith will never get over it, of course, the book must be ruined—he is at the Court House now, and how shall I ever tell him when he comes back? and—*where is* Babba?"

She began to cry, helplessly.

Anne did her best to encourage her. "We shall soon find him—he can't be far off. Get your sun hat and we will go out and look for him again. Where is Buria?"

"She is searching the servants' quarters," sobbed the distracted mother. "Oh! supposing he has run off to the bazaar, with all those awful people about! He might be kidnapped or murdered—Griff once came across the head of a native child lying in the gutter in the city! or he may have crept into a hole somewhere in the compound and been bitten by a snake——"

"It is far more probable that he is watching everybody search for him from a perfectly safe place," replied Anne. "Come along. I saw your hat on the table in the veranda. You mustn't go into the sun again without it."

As they went out they passed the resting place of the gigantic kite that Anne had noticed on her arrival. She glanced at it again; watched it attentively for a moment; then went towards it.

"Oh! don't touch Babba's kite!" said Mrs. Stapely querulously, "he can't bear anybody but

himself and the butler's boy to lay a finger on it. The butler's boy made it for him—they always fly kites together in the spring——"

But Anne seized the sacred object with a ruthless hand; and there, behind it, crouched against the wall, was Babba.

CHAPTER XIX

MRS. STAPELY'S alarm concerning the safety of her son turned to mingled relief and anger. She kissed him and shook him alternately; while tears of rebellion streamed down his cheeks, and he yelled abuse in fluent Hindustani at Miss Crivener for her malevolence in having discovered his hiding place.

Anne was sorry for the child. Already her own soreness of heart had given her a certain sympathy with other people in trouble; and she could see that the little boy was really frightened as to the consequences of his deliberate act of mischief. His "Brownie" face was paler and more pinched than usual; his large dark eyes were like the eyes of a hunted rabbit. But his apprehension, far from rendering him contrite or humble, seemed only to increase his naughtiness. He kicked and screamed, and used bad native words which his mother felt thankful Miss Crivener could not understand.

All the time Anne was conscious of a fellow-feeling for the sinner. Like herself he had done wrong, yet resented punishment; he had pleased himself at the expense of others, and retribution was likely to overtake him, yet he would not acknowledge that he deserved it, and was none the less furious with his fate.

"Oh! Babba—*what* will Dadda say when he comes home and hears how naughty you have been?" wailed Mrs. Stapely; and Babba howled afresh, and wished he was at the bottom of the garden well along with the lumps of paper that had made such a lovely hollow splash in the water, ever so far down, long after he had pushed them over the edge.

"Don't scold him," said Anne, pityingly.

She drew the child, violent and obstreperous, from his mother, who said she must let the servants know that he was safe, and also set some of them again to try and recover the manuscript from the well.

Mrs. Stapely darted round to the back premises; and Anne held the little boy in front of her, grasping him firmly above the elbows. His arms felt like sticks of rhubarb.

"Babba," she said, and the magic persuasion of her voice silenced the child's angry outcries. "Listen Babba. There was once a little boy who did something very naughty and unkind. But he was sorry, and he told his mother he was sorry, and said he would try to be quiet and good and show that he could make everybody pleased with him again. So his mother went to his father and told him what the little boy had said, and how sorry he was. And the father said, 'Very well, if he will be good now, we will not punish him. He has been very frightened and he knows he has done wrong, and when people know that, it makes all the difference! So

we will forgive him, but he must try hard not to be naughty.'"

Babba stared up into the pretty Miss-sahib's brown eyes, and a look of understanding stole over his small face. He put his grimy forefinger into his mouth, and made a real effort to control the sobs that still shook him.

"Yes, I was nartee-bad!" he jerked out, with repentance. "But now I am good and sorry. Will Genkle Jesus pity me as well as the mice if I ask him to-night in my prayers?"

"What do you mean?" Anne inquired, much puzzled.

"Every night I say to Genkle Jesus, 'Pity mice im-plic-it-*lee*.' But mice aren't naughty are they? Not like me?"

Babba was clearly the victim of one of those curious miscomprehensions of childhood which often are never corrected till the age of intelligent reasoning has arrived, because children so seldom betray them, accepting, as they do, such apparent absurdities in all good faith.

Anne stifled her impulse to laugh; also she shirked elucidation of the matter. Babba might resent, fiercely, any attempt to do away with his nightly intercession on behalf of the mouse world!

So she said, with tenderness, "But you are not naughty now, darling," and kissed him. Immediately she felt amazed at herself; she could not have believed that she would ever kiss Babba willingly.

The child did not pursue the question of the mice, for which Anne was grateful; but he climbed into her lap, comforted, and cuddled his flaxen head on to her shoulder. At first his frail little body still quivered with tremulous after-sobs; but soon they ceased, and Babba, worn out with temper and excitement and a guilty conscience, fell asleep.

Buria came hurrying out with a swish of petticoats and a tinkle of silver ornaments; but Anne raised her hand in time, and the old woman moved away quietly, whispering her joy that no evil had befallen the precious little one. When he became a dead weight of sleep in her arms, Anne carried the child to the nursery and left him with his old ayah.

Then she went to find Mrs. Stapely, but was told that the memsahib was still out by the well superintending another attempt to raise the ill-fated manuscript. The attempt was not successful. Mrs. Stapely came back harassed and dejected; and when she heard that Babba was safely asleep she collapsed into a low chair, weary and hot and unhappy—so unlike her usual neat, alert little self.

"Isn't it dreadful!" she said, fanning her face with her handkerchief. "You won't leave me, will you Miss Crivener—you will wait till Griff comes in? Oh! how I wish Mother was here——"

"But surely you need not be in such a state!" Anne was surprised at the extent of Mrs. Stapely's agitation. "Your husband isn't an ogre. Of

course, it will be awfully vexing for him, but after all it wasn't your fault. He must make the best of it, and write the book again. I expect he has a rough copy all right——"

Mrs. Stapely began to cry. "I believe Babba threw the whole lot down the well! It was all on one table in the study tied up in bundles—Griff is so tidy. And Babba had always been told never to touch anything in his father's room. Griff will break his heart. He has been working at that book for years. He was wrapped up in it. And now he will think, more than ever, that I ought to have taken Babba home last year. I suppose he was right—but you don't know how I hate going alone!"

Mrs. Stapely then described some of the difficulties she had encountered in England and on voyages. One or two of these experiences were unintentionally entertaining, but Anne Crivener heeded none of them. She sat, leaning forward a little, looking as though she had suddenly heard a piece of good news. Her quick brain had realised in an instant that here, to her hand, was a possible means of delaying her departure from Sika.

She considered carefully before she made her first move; and she was quite ready to make it by the time Mrs. Stapely had concluded a resentful recital of how, the first time she went home after her marriage, she had sent to the nearest grocer for a tin of bacon, as she always had done in India, only to

find to her astonishment that such a thing was practically unknown in England!

"I suppose," Anne said slowly, "you will have to give in now about going home with Babba ahead of your husband?"

"Oh! I couldn't," the poor woman protested, "we shall all be going together next year when Griff gets his furlough."

"But if he considers that it would be wiser for the child's sake, and I must say I agree with him after what has happened to-day, don't you think you ought to face it?"

Mrs. Stapely only sighed.

"If you thought you could make up your mind at once," Anne continued, keeping all trace of personal anxiety from her voice, "I might arrange to put off going myself till you were ready—you remember you said you would not mind going nearly so much if we could travel together."

She looked at her companion with a friendly little smile, and waited, breathless, for the answer.

"Oh! how *kind* of you!" cried Mrs. Stapely. "Of course, it would make every difference to me. And yet I don't feel quite as if I *could* do it!" She paused, and Anne's heart sank, but in a few moments she went on wistfully: "Perhaps though, if the decision did come from me, it might make things better. I suppose in a way it really is my fault about the book, because I would not take Babba home when he began to be so unmanageable—at

any rate, Griff won't be able to help thinking it is my fault, whatever he may say!"

"I am sure if you decided to take the child to England Mr. Stapely would admire your sense and pluck," said Anne.

Personally, she did not anticipate that the Judge would play the severe husband and parent to the extent his wife seemed to fear. But if Mrs. Stapely could only be induced to make the proposal herself of taking Babba home without delay, there was not much doubt but that her offer would be accepted.

She thought it best to say nothing more definite for the moment, and lured Mrs. Stapely to an inspection of the gifts she had brought for her.

"You would find that very useful at home," Anne remarked presently, as the Judge's wife stood in front of a mirror in a hat that made her look almost pretty.

"Well, yes, I should!" she agreed, with a flicker of genuine pleasure; and Anne felt that a further advance had been made in support of her scheme.

She had become almost desperate now in her longing for respite from the obligation of leaving Sika three days hence—but she knew she must have a reasonable excuse for remaining. She could hardly declare, at the last moment, that she had merely changed her mind—that, after all, she found she did not want to go—unless, indeed, she simulated the most extravagant reluctance to part with Dion! She shrank now from such active perfidy;

she would do her utmost to employ this other and more legitimate method (*i.e.*, the postponement of her own departure ostensibly as a kindness to Mrs. Stapely) of gaining the time she needed.

There was no doubt, she argued mentally, if Mrs. Stapely made up her mind to go at once, and therefore without her husband, that it would be an actual kindness to wait and accompany her. Anne also told herself, and with truth, that whatever her motives, she was working no harm to the family by her manœuvres—in fact rather the reverse. Babba certainly ought to be taken home before the conditions of his Indian life completely demoralised him. It was certain that Mr. Stapely wished it too, as much for the sake of the child's character as on account of the temporary freedom from domestic interruptions he needed so badly for his private work; —more than ever now would he require real solitude if he was to re-write the book his small son had so mischievously destroyed! . . . And a long spell of English life would surely be an excellent thing for Mrs. Stapely; it might widen her views, and perhaps correct her tiresome Anglo-Indian habit of taking interest in little more than housekeeping and purely local events.

Anne contrived to play with subtle skill on the other woman's hesitation, with the result that by the time the Judge's trap was heard returning from the Court House she felt almost confident of success.

"Oh! there he is! Thank goodness Babba is

still asleep." Mrs. Stapely ran to the drawing-room door that led into the hall, then came back again to Anne. "What shall we do? Hadn't we better call him in here before he goes into the office room and misses the book? It would be such an awful shock to him"—she clutched Anne's arm, and added quickly, "Don't go, whatever you do. Help me to explain. . . ."

Mr. Stapely came into the room at this moment. He looked tired and abstracted; the cases to-day had been unusually heavy. He was longing for tea, and a stroll round the garden to clear his brain, and then he looked forward to a couple of hours of blissful absorption in work on his cherished book.

"Hullo! Edith—not playing tennis to-day?"

"No," said Mrs. Stapely in a faint voice, and looked at Anne.

An attentive expression came into the man's dark eyes. "What's the matter?" he inquired irritably, scenting some disaster.

His wife began to cry.

"Perhaps you," he said, turning to Anne, "will tell me what has happened?"

"I'm afraid Babba has been getting into mischief," Anne began rather nervously.

"That's nothing new," with a short laugh. "What has he done now?"

"You tell him, Miss Crivener," sobbed Edith Stapely.

"Your book," Anne said, in desperation, "the book you were writing——"

"My book?" there was angry apprehension in his voice, "who allowed the child to touch it? What has he done to it?"

He half turned, in readiness to hurry to his office room; yet waited, his eyes fixed on Anne's face, to hear the answer to his question.

Anne said distinctly, "He threw it down the well in the garden."

There was a moment's significant silence. Then without a word Stapely went out of the room.

"Oh! poor Griff," moaned his wife.

"Go after him," urged Anne, "help him."

"I should be no help!" said the other woman with bitterness, "his book life is quite separate from me. . . . I have never been able to enter it. . . . *I* can only keep the house going, and try to save money." She paused—then pointed to the window, "Look! he is going to the well."

They saw the Judge crossing the lawn with rapid steps; and in a minute a collection of servants, both Government and domestic, followed after him. Among them the butler's boy was conspicuous, shamelessly enjoying the excitement.

"He will come back soon," Mrs. Stapely continued, "when he sees that it is hopeless. The papers have been down there for hours—even if they are recovered they will be nothing but pulp."

The two stood at the window waiting in silence for Stapely to return. They saw, without attention, the hoopoe-birds, with their pretty crests, pecking in the grass; the grey squirrels that darted to and

fro in the veranda; even when a white goat appeared, trailing a broken tether behind her, and made for the flower beds, Mrs. Stapely said nothing, so intently was she watching for her husband. When at last he came, with bent head and listless pace, she drew back into the room.

"Miss Crivener—listen," she said in a low, quick voice, "there is one thing I can do for Griff, I know. I mean one thing besides housekeeping and saving money. . . . I can take Babba home; and in these last few minutes I have quite made up my mind to do it. I want you, if you will, to go to the office room and tell him. Say I thought of it and wished it myself—that is not quite true, but I can't help it—and that you have offered to wait and go with me. I can't tell him myself—I should only cry and make a scene; and it must be settled now because of your plans. I will stay in the nursery till you come to me. Babba mustn't sleep much longer, or he will be awake all night."

The little woman did not wait for Anne's consent to her request, but went swiftly through a side door; and Anne was left standing alone in the big room with the screens, and the carvings, and the draperies.

She had won! Now she had a solid reason for staying on in Sika for the present. Now she would not be forced to leave the place in miserable doubt as to whether Oliver Wray was to live or die—without seeing him again. She recognised the pathos of

the Stapelys' position; but her sympathy was cramped by her own sense of relief.

She went boldly to the office room.

"I have come to ask if I can have a few minutes' talk with you, Mr. Stapely—" He moved a chair forward, and she sat down among the business-like furniture that added to the masculine severity of the room. She looked singularly vivid and purposeful in her well-cut habit of a nut-brown shade that enhanced the rich colour of her hair and eyes.

"Your wife feels the loss of your book, in her own way, quite as keenly as you do yourself——"

Mr. Stapely did not answer. Anne wondered if he intended to convey to her by his silence that he considered she was interfering and officious. She began to understand why he always annoyed Dion so much.

"I have been with her all day," she hastened to explain, "you can't think how miserable she is!"

"Of course," he interrupted politely, "I know Edith would fully realise what the loss means to me."

Anne felt sure he longed to add "without your telling me!" and she appreciated his forbearance.

"Mrs. Stapely and I have been talking things over, and she has come to the conclusion that Babba must go home without delay. What I really came to say to you now is that, if you agree with her, I am willing to put off my journey till she and the child can be ready, and go with them. Otherwise

I shall be leaving Sika in three days; and I should have to alter my plans at once, or not at all."

He glanced at her quickly. "It is wonderfully good of you," he said, with surprised gratitude.

Then he began to walk up and down the room, his hands in his pockets; and more emotion was expressed in his face than Anne had ever seen there before. She recognised that relief and reluctance were striving against each other—that the writer and the husband were in sharp conflict.

"It would be infinitely better for Babba to go now than to wait another year," she said, with swift intuition, "and Mrs. Stapely really does not mind the idea if she has a friend with her—she particularly asked me to tell you so. She would have come herself to talk it over with you now, only she is quite done up. She has had a terrible day. Babba ran away and could not be found anywhere for some time; and what with the fright about him, and the distress about you——yes," thoughtfully, "that child certainly ought to go home, he is too nice a little fellow to be spoiled by India. If I were you, Mr. Stapely, I should harden my heart and start them off. The separation would not be for very long, and I will do all I can to help your wife at home as well as on the voyage. . . ."

She had purposely avoided reference to the book. The man must not be allowed to admit that any question of his private work could influence his decision or else scruples might thrust themselves for-

ward and ruin the whole plan. She must assume that Babba's well-being was the sole consideration.

But Anne divined that the author-hunger for time and quiet, so that the child of his brain might have a chance of resurrection, was raging within him. She saw him glance furtively into the drawer he had evidently just opened as she came into the room. It was close at her side, and she observed that it was filled with pieces of paper of unequal size and quality, and that they seemed to be covered with pencil notes. No doubt he had a quantity of rough jottings to re-work upon, and was yearning to begin again that very moment!

"Perhaps you are right," he said, slowly, and stood still before her. "I have thought for some time that the boy has been out here too long, but of course I don't want to banish the poor little chap on account of—of what he has done to-day. I know, too, what a trial it would be for Edith." He looked at his visitor with something of pathetic appeal in his eyes.

"She recognises the necessity as clearly as you do. She won't misunderstand," said Anne encouragingly, "and I don't think she'll mind going nearly so much if I wait for her—though it sounds very inflated of me to say so!"

"It is exceedingly good of you. I hardly like——"

She rose and held out her hand. "Don't talk like that," she said cordially, "you and Mrs. Stapely

have been more than kind to me, and I am only too glad to do anything I can."

He took her hand and pressed it awkwardly, avoiding her gaze.

"Then," she asked him, "I had better tell Captain Devasse—I shall see him this evening—that I want to change my plans? I have no wish to rush you into a decision, of course, but there is no time to spare. He will have to telegraph to Bombay at once to put off my passage."

For a second he hesitated. Then he said quickly: "Yes. Tell him—if you will."

He followed her to the door, and as she passed out he added warmly, "You are a good woman, Miss Crivener!"

Anne crossed the drawing-room, to join Mrs. Stapely in Babba's nursery, with a bitter little smile on her lips.

"A good woman!" she repeated derisively, to herself, as she pushed open the door.

CHAPTER XX

On the third day after Oliver Wray had been carried, helpless and fever-stricken, to the Civil Surgeon's bungalow, the kind-hearted doctor and his wife were relieved to feel certain that they and their patient were to be spared the weary struggle of a typhoid case.

"You've had a bad go of country fever—a very bad go," Mrs. Stevens told the missionary who lay white and exhausted, yet with temperature now nearly normal, in a large bedroom that looked on the garden, bright with shrubs and flowers, "but thank goodness it was nothing worse. All the same, you will have to keep perfectly quiet for a week, and eat and drink all I give you without a grumble. Then perhaps we will let you go free!"

She spoke as if he had broken the law and was in prison. He smiled at the little pleasantry, and his grey eyes, now dull and sunken, tried to express his appreciation of her kind care. He felt too weak even to think of to-morrow, much less of what was to happen seven days hence. His brain, hardly yet free from the confusion of delirium, was still making feeble efforts to understand clearly the answers given to his questions after he had become aware that he was in a strange house.

During those days and nights of fever he had seemed to travel over vast spaces of loneliness, to rise to pinnacles of exaltation over all the ills and miseries of humanity, only to sink again through dark fathoms of despair. At other times he was with Ramanund, explaining to him the Truth, walking with him to and fro in the early morning at Thanesur; and then a dreadful darkness would descend upon them, and unseen hands would drag the boy away to unknown terrors from which the teacher could not rescue him. Again, the vision of Anne, white-robed and radiant, awaiting him in the moonlight at the head of the bathing steps, would come to him as a sweet, dominating dream; and the nightmare change that always followed, when, before his eyes, she assumed the shape of a vile disciple of idolatry, threw him into frenzies of horror . . . She was a poisoned weapon of the enemy—the enemy that he would give his life to crush and conquer. . . . All unwittingly he had yielded tribute to the foe, his love itself was but a species of idolatry, a vulnerable spot. . . . And he must fight—fight to the death if need be. Forthwith he engaged in appalling combats, wrestled with shapes of evil on the brink of vast black pits; fell from fearful heights still fiercely struggling, even in the air, with Satanic creatures, unholy and unclean. But at last there came a period of tranquility, a blessed peace, when he found himself in the presence of a mystic, stately form, clad in a yellow robe, with countenance

sublimely calm, and expressive of such unearthly purity and patience as seemed to cause all thought of self, all human weakness, sorrow, fear, to shrink to nought before the greatness of Renunciation . . .

Then Wray opened his eyes and came back to realities, to sunshine and colour, to fresh, fragrant surroundings, and the little sounds of every-day life that were like the voices of old friends.

With the gradual return of his strength his mind regained its clearness, his thoughts their activity, and he began to realise, with a wondering thankfulness, that the mental ferment of those weeks before his illness was unaccountably allayed. He found he could think of Anne quite quietly now, and with an almost impersonal tenderness that was free from the old agony of longing. He knew he was never to see Anne again—she had, of course, left Sika by this time—but the certainty brought with it a sense of humble resignation, for it would be easier now to devote himself more completely than ever to the conflict against the powers of idolatry. The thought came to him that, haply, his Master had so softened his trial that he might the more freely give himself up to his sacred purpose. And all the old sway of absorbing enthusiasm for his Divine Message flooded his soul like pure, sweet water over sun-baked soil. He yearned to be up and at work again; and as he lay through the long, peaceful hours, forbidden by his "gaolers" to read or write, he planned greater schemes of sac-

rifice and labour; inwardly he searched for yet more potent means of awakening the native soul to the light of Christ's teaching. Deeply and sadly did he ponder over the problems and disappointments of proselytism; and again the weary doubt that had been with him of late, the doubt that had arisen and confronted him with such insistence on the morning of his first encounter with Ramanund, now, encouraged by time and quiet, became fiercely importunate. With anguish he asked himself why was missionary progress in India so dishearteningly slow? Was it that the English preacher failed to strike the spark of Oriental imagination because, as an apostle of religion, he appeared to the Eastern mind to be too material, too earth-bound, too dogmatical? And might not "the padre-sahib's" theology, after all, present itself to the majority of his listeners merely as a European form of Hinduism not to be preferred, if it came to choice, to their own way of belief? Analogies brushed through his mind, Trinity, Triad; Christ, Krishna; Atonement, blood sacrifice; baptism, bathing.

Yet surely, he argued, there must be some positive means of bringing home to India a conviction of the true form of faith. And, dazzled, he dreamed of a sudden awakening, of the real spark being struck that would set the Eastern mind aflame and spread as a sheet of fire over the country, as had done the word of Buddha twenty-five centuries ago

—Buddha who, though by birth a prince, had lived the humble life of the true Eastern saint that so appeals to the Oriental religious sense . . . More and more strongly, as he lay and thought, did the missionary feel persuaded that not until the white preacher ceased to impress the people as a "sahib," not until he seemed to the native to belong to the type of visionary teacher with which they were familiar, would Christianity make sure or rapid progress in India.

The idea, unchecked as it was now by active routine work, grew and widened until it became almost an obsession. Wray saw himself emerging from solitary preparation to give forth the Word in all its grand simplicity, free from rule and dogma, free from the trammels of Western custom. And the possibility of reaching the native heart and mind as a religious reformer in the guise that they could understand and recognise, filled him with ecstatic hope and burning spiritual ambition. Continually he quoted to himself, "Unto the Jews they became as Jews that they might gain the Jews."

Padre Williams, who came to sit with Wray the first afternoon that he was up and in a long chair in the veranda, was alarmed and concerned at the hold the theory seemed to have gained over his mind.

"My dear boy, it has been tried before," the old man said, in kindly reproof, "other enthusiasts have felt as you do, and have endeavoured to put the idea

into practice—have lived the life of the Hindu ascetic, preaching Christ from an Oriental standpoint; and it has almost always resulted in loss of health or reason, or worse, in death. Where the experimenter has 'come through' it is very doubtful if he ever succeeded in doing as much good as if he had been true to English Mission traditions, and kept to practical work that must have far reaching consequences, however slow the visible return. Then," he added a little sternly, "to practise our religion in Oriental fashion would seem to be an acceptance of Hindu methods which could not well be tolerated by the Church."

Wray threw out his long, nervous hands, and his eyes darkened with weary impatience. He raised himself from the cushions at his back.

"But we are so slow, so tardy!" he protested, "we never seem to get any further in a spiritual sense—Oh! yes—I realise well enough the material good we are doing—education, care of the sick, training the orphan, guiding the convert, and in time it may all lead to something approaching what we wish. But tell me, where do we stand *now,* after years and years of this same work? Have we made any definite headway against idolatry—the evil core of the country? A few genuine converts, perhaps, from the lowest castes; and in times of famine and epidemic the legitimate adoption of a certain number of children that can be reared as Christians, and afterwards married to each other

that their families may also be Christians. But of wholesale conversion there is no sign! I tell you, to change the entire current of Eastern thought a trumpet-call is needed—something loud and long and arresting, that will rouse the people to a sense of their spiritual condition, and *force* them to realise the truth. . . ."

He sank back breathless, his eyes luminous, his black brows drawn together with the intensity of his feeling. The old missionary did not argue—instead he tried to think how best he could lead Wray from the subject. He polished his glasses with his thick cotton handkerchief, then put them on, and looked with regretful attention at the white, transparent face opposite him. Mr. Williams had met with one or two such cases of perverted enthusiasm in his long service, and he well knew that argument had small effect against it.

"We can only be patient," he said mildly, "and try to remember that the matter does not rest entirely in our hands. We are doing our best as a body—in what is recognised by our Church as the best way. The mills of God grind slowly, but when the appointed time arrives the result of our labours will be apparent, though neither you nor I may be here to see it. At any rate, you must wait till you are stronger before we attempt to thresh out such a question together. The body affects the mind, Oliver, and things often appear different to us when we are not in our usual good health . . ."

A sigh was the only response; and Mr. Williams began to talk of everyday happenings—to tell little bits of news.

"Old Nattoo died yesterday," he said, "and I know you will be rejoiced to hear that he asked to be baptised before the end came—he behaved splendidly in spite of the opposition of his grandsons. I feel very thankful that he was brave enough to defy them. Sophia said I was to be sure and tell you that her girls have come out well in the examination. She is very much elated about it. Also she has received a large order for Easter cards which will bring in a good sum for the Mission, and, of course, she is very busy getting them painted in her spare time. Anne is most kind in helping her; Anne's taste is excellent."

Wray felt as though a sharp stone had been thrown at his heart. "Anne?—I mean Miss Crivener—" he said in agitated surprise that Mr. Williams mistook for interest, and so felt relieved to have attracted the sick man's notice to some mundane matter.

"No," he said, smiling, "Anne has not gone yet. She has delayed her departure in order to travel with Mrs. Stapely and her little boy, who are going home rather unexpectedly. Naturally Captain Devasse is overjoyed—he calls it his reprieve! I must say the young man appears most devoted, which is just as it should be."

Wray said nothing, and after a few more well intentioned remarks Mr. Williams rose to go.

"I am afraid you are tired—you are still weak," he said with sympathy. "When you return to us you must be careful not to overdo it at first, or you will break down again."

"I shall be back in a few days," Wray said, "the fever has gone, and one soon picks up then—and I am longing to be at work."

The impatience in his voice, the anxiety in his eyes, caused the old missionary to linger in the veranda. After a few moments he said, "Sophia and I were talking this morning of making a round of some of the nearer villages very soon—before the weather gets too hot for her to be in tents. She needs a change. What do you say to coming with us? I should be really grateful for your company and help."

For once Mr. Williams was actually manœuvring! He feared that Wray would take up the strain of city work too soon, and make demands on his strength that probably could not be fulfilled without disaster. Also he felt extremely unwilling that the young missionary should have much of his own company while in his present frame of mind. The old man anticipated opposition to his proposal, and was surprised to meet with ready acquiescence. An expression came over the younger man's face that puzzled Mr. Williams, who could not know that the prospect of getting away into the district had given Wray a sense of painful relief, because it would spare him the disquietude of daily meetings with Anne before the time of her departure with Mrs.

Stapely. He felt if he could only manage to get away without seeing her again how much heartache it would save him!

"I should be very glad to go with you," he said eagerly. "Could we start directly I am allowed out?"

Mr. Williams reflected. Certainly it would be more advisable that Wray should have the comparative quiet and the open air life of a mild itineration immediately after such a sharp attack of fever, than that he should be toiling in the schools, passing long hours in the dirt-infested bazaars, leading the laborious life of city work, till he was strong and well again. His ardour must be held within bounds; and while in camp the old missionary would be able to see that there was no staying out too late in the sun, that meals were taken at proper hours, that enough time was allowed for necessary sleep. Also there was the fatal fanaticism that had so gained on Wray's mind of late, that must be reasoned out of him or at least subdued, if the influence of age and experience and common-sense could do it. Mr. Williams had a strong affection for this ardent, devoted soul, and he was determined that Wray's valuable services should not be lost or perverted if it were in his power to prevent it.

"With a little arrangement I think we might start in a week," he said. "The Drapers will carry on the work here, and just now things are going fairly smoothly. Sophia would welcome an imme-

diate start, she loves camp life—her only regret may be the earlier parting with her sister. We had intended to wait till after Miss Crivener's departure, but I am sure it would be quite possible to go directly you are fit for it; and I feel certain the change would be the best thing for you."

Dr. Stevens was consulted. He said that the patient would be practically himself again in two or three days; and "much better for him to go into tents for a bit, if he didn't overdo the preaching business," etc.

"Oh! I will see to that," said Mr. Williams with confidence.

While Wray was talking with his chief, Anne and Sophia sat at the round table in the Mission House veranda, the latter busy with her Easter cards, the former reading aloud from a missionary publication. Sophia had suggested, deprecatingly, that time might be saved if Anne would so very kindly read to her some of the articles in the current number while she painted.

"If we do start out into camp directly you are gone, it will rush me rather with the cards," she said.

And Anne was pleased to be graciously good-natured, so filling Sophia with rapturous gratitude.

Anne was not altogether sorry to have the occupation. Dion was playing polo and she had refused to sit and watch him. She was not particularly interested in the game, and the people who would have

been her fellow spectators possessed no attraction for her. Mrs. Stapely she would see quite enough of during their journey together—she had no wish to pass her time in the Judge's bungalow; and she welcomed the quiet afternoon in the broad veranda of the Mission House as a restful pause in the effort of her present days. The hot sunshine outside, the metallic note of the copper-smith bird, the silvery chirrup of the little grey squirrels, and the heavy perfume of the jessamine from the trelliswork gave her a sense of consolation.

When Anne had known that Oliver's life was safe, the reaction from the sharp anxiety and suspense was severe. She felt exhausted in mind, and listless in body; her only stimulus was the prospect of seeing him again before she left; though, at the same time, she dreaded the meeting almost as much as she had feared that it was never to be. Beyond this meeting, for her, there seemed no future. She could not look ahead. Her whole mental strength was concentrated in the one event.

Now, with rather ostentatious patience, she continued to read aloud semi-humorous anecdotes connected with missionary life, and various reminiscences of the mission field——

"It was a great joy," Anne's charming voice gave every advantage to the words, "on the first Sunday after my return to work, to be permitted to devote my day to a Bible class for elder girls. It was delightful to know that I could look forward to

this as a weekly privilege. We do so long and pray that the result——"

Anne threw the paper down on to the heap of blank cards that awaited decoration. "Sophia—I can't stand any more of this," she said. "Let me read something that will interest us both. Really I don't wonder that people won't be bothered with missionary literature—if you call it literature! Could anything be more tedious than the sickly stuff I have been reading to you? Who cares about this female's delights and privileges, or what she was permitted, or what she longs and prays for! Why didn't she write about the result of her teaching in her Bible Class—what the 'elder girls' said about it—how it impressed them in comparison with their native religion, what real effect it had on their behaviour?—but no—as far as I can make out it's nothing but privileges, and permittings, and prayings! Now, I have got a book in my bedroom that Dion Devasse lent me,—all about real people—what they did, and felt, and ate, and wore as human beings, not as religious machines. I'll get it; I am sure you'll find it far more interesting than this sort of thing."

She flipped the paper-covered periodical contemptuously with her fingers.

Sophia glanced round uneasily, as though fearing that Anne's remarks might have been overheard.

"Darling Annie!" she said in persuasive apology, "you know, personally, I really enjoy a novel now

and then! But novels are not considered quite—quite *wholesome* by many of our people, and I quite realise why. They take us away from the facts of our daily life, and perhaps waste our time and thoughts. But," she added, as though imparting a lively secret, "I generally take one or two into camp with me! I look upon our little tours as my holiday time, and I take care to enjoy myself!"

Anne looked at her with a compassion that was mingled with envy. Poor Sophia! and yet perhaps she was really fortunate in being satisfied with so little. At least she had never known the unease of heart and soul that oppressed her step-sister so sorely!

"I wish you could have come into camp with us," said Sophia, "I am sure you would enjoy it. But while *we* are in tents, *you* will be on the sea!"

"Yes, I wish I could have come," said Anne.

"What a pity we didn't think of it before!" exclaimed Sophia.

"Yes," Anne thought with dull regret of how such a plan might have relieved the strain of this time before her departure. She would have been free from the weary obligation of behaving like a happy woman; beyond the range of Dion's honest eyes and affectionate cares that often racked her with remorse; alone with the kindly-hearted father and daughter who accepted her moods and disturbed her with no troublesome questions. . . .

And, just then, Mr. Williams came back from the

Civil Surgeon's bungalow and asked Sophia in his blunt way, if she could be ready to start into camp within the next few days!

"There now!" cried Sophia. She dropped her paint brush, turned in her chair, and clapped her hands. "What an extraordinary thing to be sure! Anne and I were only saying this moment what a pity it was we weren't going into camp before she left us, so that she might have a little taste of tent life in India. And now we shall be able to manage it after all. Of course I can be ready, Father," she added briskly, "but I never dreamt that you could! What has happened?"

Briefly he told her that the change of plan was for the benefit of Mr. Wray; and Sophia acquiesced with readiness. Even had it meant parting from Anne earlier than was inevitable, she would have raised no protest—she was too well trained in cheerful obedience to set her wishes against those of her father. Generally he considered her as far as was possible without interference with duty; but on this occasion Sophia's inclination would have received small attention, seeing that the welfare of the Mission work was concerned.

Mr. Williams looked at Anne. "Would you really like to come with us for a few days?" he asked. "We shall be marching only a short distance out at first, beginning with Thanesur, I think; there are so many villages round about there. It would be easy for you to spend a little time in camp

before leaving Sika—if you really wished it, that is to say."

He noticed her hesitation, and imagined that she was reluctant to part with Captain Devasse before it was unavoidable. "And very natural too," thought the old man with sympathy. Aloud he said —"Well, think it over. You need not decide to-day—if you care to come you will be very welcome. If you prefer not, we will make arrangements for you to stay on here—unless you would rather go to Mrs. Stapely till you start——"

He went into the house, and Sophia resumed her painting to the accompaniment of endearing entreaties that Anne would at once make up her mind to come—if only for a couple of days.

Anne paid no heed to Sophia. She stared out into the mellow, afternoon sunshine, while questions, doubts, and arguments clamoured in her brain. Should she go? Could she bear it? Which would be the keener—the happiness or the pain? At one moment the temptation to seize on this last chance of quiet companionship with the man who absorbed her being was overwhelming. Then again she shrank from the trial of her strength. He believed she loved her future husband and she must leave him secure in this belief; and could she do so if they were together in all the intimacy of camp life knowing, as she did, that in his heart he loved her, however determined he might be to regard that love as a weakness to be conquered! She had seen the

truth in his eyes the day she had lied to Mr. Williams and, turning, had found him standing in the room. . . . She thought of Thanesur and her dream. Ah! to think that they might linger together in reality among the ruins, breathing the sunny, scented air; that they might have long intimate talks! . . . Would it be unfair to him? Surely not, if she never betrayed herself by word or look?—Perhaps if she only went for two days—three days?—and then came back to the Stapelys, and to Dion, with her secret buried deep in her heart, and the past behind her for ever?

CHAPTER XXI

ANNE stood outside the shabby little tent that was to serve as bedroom for herself and Sophia, and gazed dreamily over the sun-bathed ruins of Thanesur.

All about her was a warm silence; and beyond the massive, battered tower, heaps of stones, weed-hidden mounds, and sand-coloured waste, she could see undulating crops of wheat, barley, pulse; snowy opium fields, and a small white temple gleaming in the sun. Trees flanked the group of tents—mango, nim, tamarind, accacia—and these were bursting into bloom. The heavy scent of their blossom floated over the little camp in soft, caressing waves. The whole landscape, flat and dry, and yellow as it was, seemed impregnated with a profound peace; and Anne welcomed the still serenity the more by reason of its contrast with the pressure of the last few days.

Dion had been unexpectedly obstructive over her proposed expedition into camp. For the first time she had seen him impatient, almost actually cross with her—and his opposition, for which he could give no definite reason, caused her considerable surprise. She did not divine the real root of the trouble—*i.e.*, his unconscious jealousy of Wray. It was

one of those nebulous intuitions, hardly to be recognised even by the victims thereof themselves, that yet have an irritating effect upon the mind and nerves, like a disease undeclared and unrealised.

Anne held firmly, and without argument, to her intention; and awaited Dion's penitence. When it came she pardoned him with ready sweetness, and listened with kind composure to his remorseful abuse of his own selfishness, and "vile, brutal temper!" He declared she was an angel of goodness and patience; that of course he knew perfectly well she wasn't going away for her own amusement or pleasure, but because Mr. Williams and Sophia wanted her—and he, beast that he was, had done his worst to make it more difficult for her! But if she only knew how hard it was for him to have to part with her when she was leaving India so soon!—and it really was very exasperating of Mr. Williams, and just like a parson, to want to go off at the time that was most inconvenient to everybody else. . . . all the same he quite understood that her own people must be considered first, especially as it might be years, if ever, before they could see her again. He was most awfully sorry he had made such an ass of himself, &c., &c.

In addition, all Anne's courage had been needed for the first meeting with Oliver Wray after his return. The effort to appear natural, and friendly, and calm was severe; and the look on his face when he heard that she was to join the camping party had

almost unnerved her. Without a word he had turned away; and though she saw but little of him during the few days previous to their start she fancied that he had wished to say something in particular to her, and could not bring himself to do it.

This morning Anne and Sophia had driven out to Thanesur in the old buggy, and had since been busy settling the camp. Now Sophia was engaged in haranguing a group of children who had strayed from the village behind the trees to gaze with awe and curiosity at the tents, at the old cook squatting over his open-air range consisting of three bricks, at the fowls that seemed none the worse for their midnight journey in a wicker crate, and had already laid eggs for the midday breakfast.

Mr. Williams and Oliver Wray had come out earlier in the latter's trap, and were at present in the village inspecting a small school for boys that was under the direction of a native evangelist.

The perfumed air, the sunshine, the sense of space and leisure, acted as balm to Anne's troubled spirit. She seemed to bask in the present—in the knowledge that hours were yet to come before she must forego it, hours to be treasured ever after as a priceless memory. Her eyes turned to the rough roadway, hardly more than a couple of ruts, that led to the village. Soon the two missionaries would be coming in for breakfast. The table was already laid, under a large tree, and looked pleasant with its fresh white cloth, and centre decoration of golden

mustard-blossom arranged by Anne in a tumbler. Without adding refinements such as flower-vases, there was quite sufficient luggage to load the carts —the magic lantern, the medicine chest, the Bibles, Testaments, and tracts to be distributed and sold to inquirers, and Sophia's portable harmonium, besides the camp paraphernalia and personal necessaries.

Sophia joined her step-sister presently with a beaming face and her sun hat all on one side.

"Those dear children were so good!" she said with blithe satisfaction. "They listened eagerly, drinking in all I told them. I gave them one pice each, and they are all coming again to-morrow and will bring their little friends. When I was out in this direction twelve months ago we could only stay a day, and I hadn't time to do much, but one little girl, who was most persistent then with her inquiries, turned up again to-day, and said her mother had sent a message to say she would like to see me. Isn't that encouraging? As we are staying here for three or four days, so that all the villages round about may be visited without hurry, I shall have time to look up the dear female!"

Anne smiled at Sophia's curious mixture of mild flippancy and missionary phrasing; it always amused her.

"What are your plans for this afternoon?" she inquired; and was relieved to learn that father and daughter proposed to walk to a village some three miles distant; but that Sophia thought Mr. Wray

would stay quiet in the camp as this was his first morning's work since his bout of fever, and he had promised to be careful.

"Here they come!" Sophia pointed to a moving patch, blurred by dust, not far away; and a little later Wray's trap drew up in front of the tents. The cart was old, and shaky, and out of repair, it looked top-heavy with the two men seated in it; the harness was dull and almost rotten; the pony, a common country-bred, was rough and ill-groomed. The whole turn-out had a sordid, mean, appearance, that jarred on Anne's mood. She moved away; and suddenly she felt as though her personality had become double—as though she were standing apart, watching herself! What was Anne Crivener doing here, out in the yellow desolation of the Indian plains, with her heart throbbing painfully at the sight of a missionary in a large pith hat and unfashionable clothes, who would probably be regarded only with contemptuous amusement by her friends in England? What was the extraordinary attraction of this tall pale man, with the classic face and dreamy eyes, who was now descending from the miserable little trap? She had followed him out here, "run after" him like any silly, infatuated schoolgirl with no sense of self-respect! . . . Now everything seemed unreal. She felt lost and helpless, and blindly angry with herself. . . . the sun hurt her eyes, the dry air choked her, she wished she had never come, she almost determined to go

back at once to Sika. . . . And when Mr. Williams came up and said something about her first experience of camp life, she gave him a senseless answer. Then she became conscious of the surprise depicted on the padre's face.

"I have rather a headache," she said, with an apologetic smile. "I think if I go and lie down it will pass off. Sophia will bring me a cup of tea I daresay."

She turned towards her sleeping tent; and as Wray looked up from his conversation with Sophia she waved and nodded to him with conventional cordiality.

When the entrance flap of the tent dropped behind her she sat down on the edge of her narrow bed, still feeling as if she were in a dream, and fought for self-mastery.

Naturally Sophia burst in almost at once. "Oh! Annie darling, you are not ill?"

"Not at present," said Anne, coldly, "but I may be if I am not left alone."

She sat, unresponsive, while her step-sister murmured, and hesitated, and conciliated in puzzled alarm.

"Do you think you have got fever?" Sophia laid tentative fingers on Anne's wrist.

"Oh don't, Sophia!" Anne shook her off, "I'm only tired, and the glare has given me a headache. Bring me some tea, and then don't come near me again, there's a dear. I want to go to sleep."

"If you are going to be ill," persisted Sophia, in distress, "you had much better let me take you back to Sika this evening. Everything in camp is so rough, and you would at least be comfortable with Mrs. Stapely. Will you have some quinine?"

"No, no!" Anne looked up wearily; she could not explain to Sophia that her sickness was of the mind, not of the body. "Really, I shall be all right," she added, in a gentler tone. "We got up so early, and I am tired. That is all. Don't worry, Sophia. I would tell you if I were ill."

Anxious and concerned, Sophia at last left the tent to preside over the breakfast table, and her conversation throughout the meal was of Anne's sudden indisposition, and "how she did hope it was not the beginning of an illness."

The fresh tea and toast that Sophia carried to the tent with loving solicitude and deposited on a chair by her step-sister's side, refreshed Anne and soothed her nerves; and afterwards, as she lay on her bed, trying not to think, listening drowsily to the scream of parrots, the cooing of doves, the drone of servants' voices, and the petulant bleating of a tethered goat, the sounds grew fainter and further away, till she fell into a deep sleep.

When she awoke she found the tent hot and close; the mingled smell of canvas and drugget, straw and warm dust, was stifling, and she was glad to get up and bathe her face in cold water that stood in a brass basin on the camp washhandstand.

The doves still cooed, the parrots shrieked, the goat, apparently, was not yet contented, and the murmur of voices at the back was just as persistent. Anne looked at her watch; it was past four o'clock. What a long time she had slept! Mechanically she made herself tidy, peering into the tiny square looking-glass; then she put on a shady hat, took her parasol and soft doeskin gloves, and went outside.

There was no sign of activity in the camp. Evidently Sophia and Mr. Williams had started on their expedition. The mustard-blossom in the tumbler still stood on the table under the tree, but the cloth had been taken away. Close to the table, in a low canvas chair, Oliver Wray sat reading. A straw hat lay on the ground beside him—the foliage of the great tree was so dense that it was not needed.

Anne went towards him. She felt curiously inert, as if her emotions had been numbed, arrested; and when Wray sprang to his feet, scattering books and papers, the light that she saw in his eyes left her still impassive.

"Are you better?" he asked with concern.

"There was very little the matter, thanks," and she smiled civilly. "Only the drive and the sun, and helping Sophia when we arrived, brought on a slight headache. I took it in time, and now it has gone."

"I am very glad," he said flatly.

There came an awkward silence, which Anne's manners could not brook.

"How busy you are, and I have interrupted you," she said easily, and glanced down at the literary litter on the ground.

"I look busier than I am, I think," he said; and began to pick up the books and arrange the papers.

Anne stood and watched him. It seemed years since the morning when she had longed for this moment to arrive—the moment when she should find herself alone with him in uninterrupted companionship; and now it was all so different from what she had expected!

Above their heads the leaves of the tree rustled gently. Little bits of twig and bark fell now and again with gentle taps on to the table. The light goldened the bare soil and cast deep purple shadows among the stones and mounds. There was a hypnotic languor in the atmosphere, as if the sun himself were tired and felt glad to relax something of his fierce energy now that the day was drawing to a close.

"Shall we go for a stroll?" Anne suggested.

She felt a desire that was almost morbid curiosity to know how it would affect her to find herself actually wandering with him among the ruins, as in her dream! Would it lift this deadness from her heart? She hardly knew if she wished that it should do so, or not.

He agreed; and together they left the shadow of the tree, and went out into the mellow sunshine. Talking with conscious effort, they moved over the

rough ground that was warped and cracked with the heat. They remarked on the lizards that lay basking motionless on the stones and on the lumps of hard soil; and Anne pretended to be amused by their almost magic disappearance into the clefts and crevices when startled. Wray drew her attention to a shattered column on which a solitary peacock had perched himself, his tail, spread open like a gorgeous fan, shining with rich iridescence; the bird turned and saw the approaching figures, and instantly fluttered to the ground in ungainly haste, and with tail and feathers closed, and neck stretched forward, ran awkwardly to the shelter of a clump of thorn bushes. Next, behind a pile of broken bricks and images, they came upon a group of brown monkeys that dispersed in angry protest; the patriarch, a huge fellow with a red face and evil eyes, lingering behind to show his pointed teeth in a furious grin, and to chatter monkey-insults at the intruders.

Then mutual silence fell upon the man and the girl as they strolled on aimlessly. Anne breathed in the slow, sweet perfume of the tree blossoms and the warm, bitter odours of the little dry, aromatic plants that straggled among the heaps of rubbish. She looked up at Wray's profile. It was stern and set. He was gazing far into the distance. What was he thinking about? Again she felt intuitively that there was something he had an urgent wish to say to her; and, all at once, the mental lassitude and numbness lifted from Anne's being, and the sweet

enchantment of her dream stole back—thē passionate realisation of her love. A voice in her heart seemed to be singing, "Oliver! Oliver!"

Imploringly she raised her face. She must make him turn and look at her that she might see into his eyes; she must make him speak and tell her what was in his mind.

As though a bridge had been flung across between their thoughts hē turned, and simultaneously they stopped and faced each other. They were under the shadow of the great tower that stood in austere forlornness, impassive, indifferent to aught but the happenings of centuries agone. Anne's heart beat fast. The man's eyes gleamed like ice reddened with the sunset. His hands were clenched, his arms stretched stiffly down by his sides. When he spoke, his voice came harsh, shaken with a passion that shrivelled all convention.

"I ask you," he said, without preamble, "to go back to Sika! I tried to ask you not to come, but it was so difficult; it is even more difficult to say this now; yēt I realise that the alternative would be still harder. Do you know why I ask this of you? Look at me and try to understand, and for God's sake do your best to help me."

Anne dared not look at him. She groped blindly for the support of a broken shrine that stood beside her—a tumbled pile of shapeless stones—and leaned against it heavily, helplessly.

"Ah! Forgive me!" he said the next moment,

in quick self-accusation. "I have surprised you—distressed you! I ought to have held my tongue; it was weak, contemptible of me to speak. But if you could know what the strain has been! Away from you, out of sight of your face, I can fight, I can be strong; but when you are near me I can think of little else, I cannot put my soul into my work. I forget that my whole being is vowed to the service of Christ. Since that night when your mother died, and you held out your hands to me and asked me to stay with you, it has been one awful struggle to shut your image from my heart. For me there is only one way—for me such thoughts are sin—" his voice rose—"sin almost as great as if I bowed down before the gods that I am here to overthrow! I am ashamed of myself, ashamed of my cowardice, but I haven't the courage to face these days in silence, and—I have told you the truth. Now that you know it, I beseech you go back to Sika, to the man you love, to your own bright, happy life—'Anne, be kind to me—go back!"

Exhausted and unhinged he sat down on a fallen pillar, his face hidden in the palms of his hands.

It was then that Anne realised clearly, and for the first time, the actual claim of Wray's spiritual ideals over his mortal nature. She saw herself as a temptation in his path, as a weight on his soul, as a distraction from his religious purpose. She understood that his earthly instincts were a gall and hindrance to his spirit; and she knew now that, even had she

been free, he would still have resisted the desire to win her for his wife. . . .

And out among these shattered Buddhist relics that breathed of past sacrifice and renunciation, under the cloudless splendour of the Eastern sky, in the warm, dry, scented air, Anne's soul awoke and demanded the noble right to live.

She became sharply conscious of her selfish nature, of her cruelty, her pride, her treachery. It was as though her faults and failings were paraded before her in solemn, relentless review—and she shrank and cowered from the appalling display of her own unworthiness. . . .

The natural valiance of her Crivener blood spurred her to action. If, through earthly love, Oliver Wray felt himself debased, dragged down, —then through this same earthly love she would rise and conquer the evil that was in her. Because she loved him she would beat down the consuming impulse to go to him, to kneel beside him, and whisper that she loved him, that he, of all men, was the real ruler of her heart. For his sake she would forego the mad moments of ecstasy that she knew must follow if she yielded to her longing, brief though they might be. Once again she would dissemble, and lie, and play a part; not this time for her own ends, but to save him pain; and then she would have done forever with all hypocrisy and falsehood, and would be true to the best that was in herself.

She gathered all her strength together, took her hand from the sun-heated stone, that in her suffering she had grasped so tightly as to tear the glove, and threw back her head with the little defiant gesture—Granny's symbol of self-confidence in times of mental emergency. Her cheeks were white, but her eyes and lips were brave.

"Mr. Wray," she said softly.

How she yearned to touch the bowed shoulder so near to her hand! But she dared not trust herself; what she meant to do must be done quickly and well, or not at all.

He looked up, and the expression on his face seared her heart.

"I—I am so sorry," she murmured; and hysterically she thought of conventional heroines of fiction who are overcome with horrified pity at a declaration of unrequited love! She almost wished she could "swoon" in orthodox fashion. "I am more than sorry! And, of course," she added in apparently generous response to his appeal, "I will do as you ask. I will go back. I will go back this evening; it will be quite easy—Sophia herself suggested it this morning, and really I shall be glad to do it—apart from anything else. I think," she laughed nervously, "that camp life is not so attractive as I thought, and, and—of course, if one were ill"—she broke off in trembling confusion; then she said with energy: "Mr. Wray—believe me, I did not know, or I would never have come!"

Oh, how false, and inarticulate, and hopeless it all sounded! Was it actually happening, or was she in a dream?

He stood up, straight and tall; and all the tender, human weakness of her love went out to him in dumb agony.

"Thank you," he said simply.

And then, for a moment, he looked at her in lingering farewell. His eyes travelled slowly over her proud, delicate face; from the crown of bright hair waving under the brim of her hat, to the glimpse of round, white throat above the soft collar of her gown.

"Will you forgive me if I leave you?" he said unsteadily, "if I go—go somewhere by myself. I must be alone."

Anne made a gracious little gesture of sympathetic, regretful understanding, and turned silently towards the tents. . . .

When Mr. Williams and his daughter came back from their visit to the neighbouring village, Sophia rushed at once to her sleeping tent, and found Anne lying on one of the little camp beds.

"O! Annie, are you *no* better?" She sat down on the bed, and laid a warm, damp hand on Anne's forehead in affectionate distress.

Anne raised herself on her elbow, and presented a white, weary face to her step-sister. "Yes, I am better," she said slowly, "but I think, after all, I

will take your advice and go back to the Station. Would it be hideously inconvenient if I went back this evening?"

"Oh! I am sure you feel worse than you will admit!" cried the distracted Sophia, and she began to walk up and down the little tent, "and I expect it would really be the wisest thing to do. You can never tell in India what you may be going to have in the way of illness. Nobody thought I was ill when I had typhoid till I was so bad I couldn't speak, or hold up my head! Yes, I feel sure you ought to go back. I will take you myself before it gets quite dark. All your things will go in the buggy—you brought so little; and five miles is nothing, it won't hurt the horse a bit to do it again. I will leave you at Mrs. Stapely's, and go to the Mission House myself till I know if you are all right. Tabitha and the cook's boy are there, so I can manage well, and father and Mr. Wray are used to being in camp alone. I feel," she concluded with a sob, "as if nothing mattered, not even work, in comparison with you!"

For the first time Anne was touched to real tenderness by the genuine devotion of this simple, excellent soul, who believed in her so entirely, and would regret her with such affection when she was gone.

"Sophia!" she said, with true feeling in her voice, and held out her hand.

Instantly Sophia came and knelt beside the bed,

and held Anne's hand against her cheek. "I feel so ashamed," she murmured, "because I can't help thinking a little of myself—it is such a disappointment to lose these precious days, and yet I know you ought to go."

Anne put her arms about Sophia's neck. "Dear," she said sadly, "I owe you the truth. I am not ill. I am not going back because I am ill, but because—" she hesitated, then said quickly—"because I care too much for Oliver Wray."

She felt Sophia's clasp tighten spasmodically and heard a painful gasp of "Oh! Annie!"

"Yes—it is no use saying much about it—you are the only person I shall ever tell, and I ask you to promise to keep my secret. He does not know. He must never know. Sophia," Anne drew back and looked into the other's dilated eyes, "promise me!"

Sophia was trembling with sympathy, with astonishment, almost with horror.

"Oh!" she breathed. "Oh!—but Annie, darling—if he knew, surely he must return it, surely he——"

Anne nearly shook her. "Be quiet—be quiet!" she said sharply. "Don't make it worse for me, don't make me sorry I told you. He must *never* know. Do you hear? It would not make the smallest difference. If you care for me at all, Sophia, you will do as I ask you—promise you will never

tell *anybody* what I have said to you this evening; promise—quickly!"

"Yes, yes," Sophia hastened to reassure her, "of course I promise. You know you can trust me for ever. But oh! Annie, I am so bitterly sorry. I never imagined such a thing. My dear, dearest one —I can't endure that you should suffer; what can I do?"

"Nothing," Anne spoke quietly again, and found a certain consolation in Sophia's agony of pity, "only help me by taking me back to Sika now. . . . Yes, there *is* something else I should like to ask of you before we—before we say no more about it, and that is, when you write to me please never mention Mr. Wray at all."

Sophia nodded dumbly, choked with her grief.

"And now, I suppose, we ought to be getting ready." Anne dragged herself to her feet. "And I must say good-bye to your father. I will tell him I don't feel fit and think I had better go back at once before I get any worse. It is really true," she added, out of consideration for Sophia's scruples, "that I have a ghastly headache!"

Therefore, an hour or so later, when sunset had flung a rosy radiance over the scene, Wray, who still lingered among the crumbling stones, watched a ramshackle old buggy bumping its way over the primitive track towards the metalled road that was only indicated by a double line of trees in the dis-

tance. The vehicle held two figures, one slim and graceful, the other thick and commonplace.

When the jolting, swaying object passed from his sight an immense desolation fell upon his spirit. He wandered in and out among the darkening blocks of historical remains, enshrouded in the melancholy silence. "Ah! God!" he whispered, over and over again, barely conscious of the words he uttered, "make me worthy of this trial!"

Without being aware of the direction he had taken, he suddenly found himself close to the walls of the Thanesur fort; and for a long while he paced to and fro over one spot of hard ground, absorbed in thoughts of Anne, of Ramanund, and of the great scheme of conversion that had laid so strong a grip on his religious fancy. The rosy light faded, and the suceeding greys and mauves dwindled into darkness. He paid no heed to the hour; for the time he was oblivious of, and apart from the claims of temporal existence.

And as he lingered in the dusk that soon would be actual night, a sound aroused him from his dreams. It was the sudden, tearing hiss of fireworks, and a streak of fire shot fiercely up into the sky from the fort walls, to change in a moment to a spray of gently dropping sparks. Another followed, and another; and then there arose the beat of tom-toms, the clashing of cymbals, the wail of stringed instruments and the nasal chanting of native professional singers. Some event was being

celebrated within the fort. Perhaps a child had been born; perhaps some member of the family was going to be married. . . . Involuntarily Wray stumbled on towards the main entrance that loomed huge and irregular, scarcely outlined in the dim light. He could hear voices, loud and excited, the rattle of arms and harness; and presently the clang of an iron-bound door rent the atmosphere like the blasting of a rock. A horse and rider clattered out at full gallop, and the animal shied violently as it passed Wray's figure. The native on its back gave a frightened cry, convinced that he had encountered the deadliest of ghosts.

"It is all right," Wray called to him in Hindustani.

The man pulled his horse round. "Pardon, sahib," he said in hasty apology, recognising the voice of an Englishman. "I have to ride quickly to Sika with a message to the priests concerning the marriage, and this horse of mine is truly a budmash (villain)."

Wray laid his hand on the absurdly ornamented bridle of the white stallion, that snorted and plunged with impatience.

"What marriage?" he said, in sudden foreboding.

There came a native exclamation of jubilation, then: "Sahib, Ramanund, son of the Rajah of Thanesur, takes another wife. . . ."

The horse leapt forward before the sentence could

be finished, and was gone with a rapid thudding of hoofs that grew fainter and fainter.

Wray stood as one transfixed, realising that his fight for the soul of Ramanund had ended in victory to caste, and custom, and idolatry.

A jackal howled near by, and the cry, taken up by the pack, swelled in hideous harmony with the discordant sounds of revelry within the fort.

Heavily Wray turned, brain-sick and despairing, and began a difficult journey back to the camp, the lights of which he could see twinkling far away.

CHAPTER XXII

ANNE stayed with Sophia that night in spite of her step-sister's conscientious warnings as to the discomfort of a practically servantless house.

"I am sure we shall get no dinner!" Sophia prophesied, as they drove up to the veranda.

However, the cook's boy, elated with the unexpected opportunity of displaying his capabilities, declared with conceited confidence that he could produce an excellent meal for the Miss-sahibs at the shortest possible notice. "As it was," he boasted, "did he not do most of the cooking, whether his father, the cook, was absent or present?" A statement that the said parent would no doubt have resented drastically, could he have heard it.

The result was a pretentious and rather extraordinary meal, served as well as cooked by the ambitious youth, who strode from kitchen to dining-room enveloped in an old coat of his father's that trailed on the ground. His ludicrous airs of importance were welcomed by Anne and Sophia, who both felt, privately, that had they not found excuse for laughter they probably must have cried.

After dinner Anne wrote to Mrs. Stapely. "I will send the note in the morning," she told Sophia,

"and when you have gone back to the camp I will take my things over there. Mrs. Stapely won't mind having me a day or two earlier than we had arranged, I know."

Sophia sighed. "Yes, I suppose I ought to go back to-morrow. It would be different if you were really ill, Anne dear; but as it is, I have no excuse for neglecting the work already planned. I know father is counting on my help with the women and children of those villages."

Anne did not answer. She was writing another note now, seated at one end of the partially cleared dining-table, the light of the solitary oil-lamp burnishing her hair. Sophia noticed that she bent over the table with a look of distress on her face and many pauses of the pen; therefore, with a tactful understanding born of her passionate affection for Anne, she beat back the questions she was burning to ask. What was Anne going to do about her engagement? Did she mean to marry Dion Devasse all the same? Sophia would hardly admit, even to herself, that her adored Anne could contemplate any course that might not be entirely honourable. If Anne married Captain Devasse now, it would surely be only in the highest spirit of self-sacrifice—because she felt bound for some altruistic reason to do so! Thus Sophia appeased her doubts, and conquered her very human curiosity; and Anne, who had been prepared for questions, accepted the other's silence with grateful relief. She would have replied

to inquiries had they been put to her, but she shrank painfully from opening the subject herself, and was only too thankful to avoid it. The barrier of reserve that so often rises up between two hearts vibrating with emotion, held them both from uttering their thoughts. And so the second letter, finished by Anne before they went to bed that night, was not mentioned between them, though Sophia observed that it was addressed to Captain Devasse, and presumed that it would be sent off early next day with the note to Mrs. Stapely.

In the morning, soon after sunrise, Sophia got into the buggy and drove out of the compound, her homely face all stained and swollen with tears, her heart heavy with the sorrow of farewell. Anne stood in the veranda and gazed at the puffs of dust that rose above the mud wall of the compound, marking the progress of the vehicle along the road. Her own eyes were wet, for she had felt the parting more than she could have believed possible; and yet she was aware of an extraordinary sense of relief. Now she was free to concentrate her mind on the thing she meant to do; now she could think over her resolve, without interruption, until the time came to carry it into effect.

But when she turned back into the bungalow her thoughts refused to obey her will; the state of her mind was like the soundless lull in a storm before it renews itself with fiercer energy, and she felt incapable of mental effort. It was as if Nature had

rendered her temporarily insensible to trouble, as a rest from her unease of spirit.

The sitting-room looked infinitely desolate and depressing, for the careful Sophia had shrouded the furniture in sheets of newspaper before the general departure into camp. Newspaper was spread all over the floor, and even twisted about the legs of the chairs and tables. Anne swept the protection from the stiff bamboo couch and sat down. It was here she had sat when she entered this room for the first time . . . she thought of the frail figure with the little knitted shawl draping the shoulders—the timid, colourless woman who had greeted her with such inarticulate happiness. She thought of the night of her mother's death; of the day when she had assured her step-father of her love for Dion Devasse, and had turned to meet the eyes of Oliver Wray. She knew that her real life had been lived between these prosaic, whitewashed walls. . . . Her mind would only work back, not forward.

Restlessly she rose and went out again into the veranda. All the chairs had been put away, only the round table stood there, sloping limply to one side. It was curious not to see Sophia bending over it, painting industriously, or cutting out garments. Anne listened with a sick anticipation for the sound of wheels and the sharp trot of hoofs. Dion might be here at any moment.

Tabitha sidled round the corner of the bugalow. She had come to ask permission to visit relations in

the bazaar, and Annē, ignorant that the said relations were "out of bounds" for Tabitha, nodded assent, not sorry to feel that she would be free from the inquisitive bright eyes and furtive, fluttering presence of the native girl. Tabitha, with a spuriously clear conscience, departed to a merry-making with tabooed associates; though she would not have done so without permission, for she had been taught honesty as far as she could understand it. But, she argued, since permission only was required, it seemed a pity to lose the opportunity of obtaining it, and whether the Miss-sahib knew that the relatives were undesirable or not, was surely no concern of Tabitha's!

When the tinkle of bangles and swish of petticoats had passed from Anne's hearing, a dogcart swept through the gateway into the compound. Seeing it, the girl hurried again into the sitting-room, and waited in nervous expectation. The moments seemed audible, ticking off the time like a watch that hurries on the dreadful hour. She knew that once the explanation was over, when the change in her life had been accomplished, gloom and difficulty must follow; and yet there was something almost exciting in the painful situation—the kind of stimulus a young soldier may feel before going into action for the first time, perhaps to meet death or disablement.

Dion Devasse found her standing upon the crackling sheets of newspaper. Her face was nearly as

white as the bare walls around her; when he seized her hands they were cold and trembling. Anxious questions rushed from his lips, his blue eyes were full of apprehension.

"What is the matter? What has brought you back? Your note frightened me, Anne! Has anything happened?"

His grasp tightened on her hands as she tried to draw them away. The love that renders the dullest perception acute told him that, somehow, his happiness was in peril.

Anne, looking into his troubled face, realised painfully how far the consequences of ill-doing may over-reach themselves, inflicting punishment on the innocent as well as on the guilty. Desperately she asked herself whether in clearing her own conscience, in whitewashing her own soul, she might not still be playing a selfish part? She wavered, and at once temptation assailed her with noisy, specious argument, urging her to leave things as they were, to save all distress and difficulty, at the least to protect and secure her own future. It would be so easy, even now; and, after all, what could it matter? She might as well suffer heartache in affluence as in comparative poverty! The old, moribund Anne arose again, and made a last stand, fighting once more for her earthly welfare, and with such plausible excuse—the preservation of Dion's peace of mind!

But the next moment she was back in spirit among

the ruins at Thanesur. She saw the grey eyes and austere, yet sensitive, face of the man who had awakened all that there was of good in her nature, latent and undeveloped though it yet might be. The newborn desire to be true struggled lustily for life; and above all her trouble and confusion rose clear the conviction that, unless she reverted deliberately to her former course of deceit and self-interest, there was only one possible way for her—the way she knew Oliver Wray would have bidden her take.

She nerved herself with supreme determination. Without remembering to answer Dion's questions, or account for her sudden return, she plunged into her confession with beating heart and voice that shook.

"Dion," she began, "you have often said you would never marry any woman who did not love you—and you have often said you knew I was not the sort of woman to marry a man I did not care for——"

She paused, breathless, feeling she was incoherent, feeling small, and weak, and wretched. The crackling of the paper under her feet seemed deafeningly loud; the room was surely close to suffocation; and the glare of the sun outside came through the windows with such a hot yellow light that it made her dizzy.

Dion kept firm hold of her hands. She heard him draw in his breath quickly. "But you do love me, Anne!" he said, almost with violence, as though

the assertion must seal the fact; much as we cry in futile rebellion, "It shall not be!" when we know that Death is robbing us of one we hold dear. "You have told me you love me. Here in this room you said, 'Dion, I love you.' My God, Anne!—what are you going to tell me now?"

"I must say it. It is the only thing to do!" Her head drooped, she spoke very low. All her dignity and self-confidence had gone from her. "Dion, forgive me if you ever can, though I don't expect it. I have deceived you, told you lies, pretended. I only said I would marry you because of your money; and I knew all about your money before I came out to India. That was *why* I came out here —to marry you! It had nothing to do with my people. I used them for my own ends. I never loved you in the way you thought——"

He gave her hands a little, desperate shake. "Anne, don't talk like that! You are ill. You must have got a touch of the sun out in that infernal camp. Where is Sophia; w—w—why——" he broke off stammering, beside himself with dread and bewilderment.

She freed her hands, and moved blindly to the couch. How should she ever make him understand?

"I am not ill, I have not had sunstroke. It is all true," she said hopelessly.

He followed her to where she sat, white and quivering, and, stooping, he looked into her eyes

that fell before the questioning misery in his face—the dull surprise of a happy, rather unthinking nature suddenly darkened.

"What was it you said? I don't understand—I can't believe——" he jerked out hoarsely.

Quietly, monotonously, Anne spoke again, and laid bare to him all her baseness of heart, her treachery, her greed, her sordid ambition. She made no excuse, she claimed no indulgence; and when at last he turned from her in silence, as though he could bear no more, she knew that she had made him realise the truth.

She watched him pace unevenly over the rustling floor, kicking up the sheets of paper, wrecking poor Sophia's precautions against dust and dirt. What must he be thinking of her now!—with his notions of honour, and his straight, fair-dealing nature. How he must despise her!

Perhaps a man's character may best be judged by what he most contemns, and falseness was the one failing for which Dion had never yet felt sympathy. Now, in the first cruel moments of astonished pain his limitations of imagination and intellect increased his suffering—perhaps made him harsher than he knew. What did it all mean! To think that Anne—*Anne!* should have behaved in this horrible way! It was incredible! He told himself he could never forgive her—that the Anne he adored had never existed, that the crushed-looking

girl seated on the little couch, with shame in every line of her attitude, was nothing to him; she was a stranger, a woman he had never met before!

He tried to speak, but his tongue felt stiff, his thoughts seemed blocked, till a possibility that stabbed through his brain like the sharpest needle forced a sentence from his lips.

"You are going to marry another man?" he burst out. And in that moment he knew, with helpless agony, that whatever Anne might do, or think, or say, she must always remain the only woman in the world for him.

Her quick mind appreciated the form his question had taken. Had he asked her if she loved another man she must have told him Yes. But as it was, she could answer him without embarrassment. There was no need to give up voluntarily the secret of her love; she did no wrong in keeping it to herself.

"No," she said, "I am not going to marry any one. I shall never marry now. Why should we say anything more, Dion? Nothing can alter facts, and words can never tell you how I hate myself, or how bitterly ashamed and sorry I am. I only hope you will forget me, and all that has happened, as quickly as you can——"

He looked at her, sitting there sad and motionless against the dismal background of bare wall and shrouded furniture; and of a sudden, in the midst of all his rage and regret, and perplexity, there came to him the recollection of a far-off experience of his

own, when, as a little boy, prevarication had saved him from punishment for some wrong-doing. He remembered how the lie had burdened his soul, though he was safe and unsuspected, until at last, unable to endure it any longer, he had told his father all the truth, trembling, sobbing, most deadly ashamed. His father's answer had made an impression on the child that had lasted through boyhood and manhood. "Old fellow, I am only proud and thankful to know that you had the pluck to speak!"

The memory slid through his mind, leaving the words "the pluck to speak" repeating themselves persistently, demanding to be heard. He stood as though attending for a moment. Then he looked at Anne again, this time with eyes from which the mist of rancour had begun to clear. "The pluck to speak"—yes, it was Anne who had had the pluck to speak, and slowly he realised that she had done no small thing in disclosing all her fault to him.

"Anne," he said gently, "what made you tell me this?"

She started in surprise at his tone, coloured, looked away—looked out of the window into the compound, over which a swirl of yellow dust was sweeping savagely, obliterating the little bungalow in the corner.

"I—see things differently," she faltered. Then with appeal she met his eyes: "Don't ask me anything more, Dion. I have told you—told you everything that matters." She drew a long breath,

and added: "It is so—*wonderful* of you not to reproach me, not to say what you think!"

"Don't," he said quickly, as if her words hurt him.

He came and stood close to her, gazing down at the coils of her bright hair, and his heart went out to her again in love and understanding pity; he forgot his own suffering, and thought only how best he might help her. Almost he wished she would give way and cry; her calmness, that was a kind of hopeless independence, was so difficult to meet!

He stood silent. She did not move. Then he sat down beside her on the couch, and mastered his longing to take her in his arms. One broad hand clutched the bamboo rail so tightly that the veins stood out like forked twigs beneath the skin. Anne had told him she did not love him, therefore he made no attempt to touch her; Dion's instincts were wholly chivalrous. His bruised heart ached for the old, happy situation; he felt confused, miserable, stunned, and yet he was glad, yes, he was glad, that Anne had had the pluck to speak! He applauded, and honoured, and loved her for it; and he determined to remember it only, excluding from his mind all thought of the injury she had done him.

"Listen to me, Anne," he said quietly. "I want to explain myself, but you know how stupid I am about putting things into words, about saying what I feel and what I mean! And I'm so afraid it may

seem as if I was just playing my own game—from a man's point of view. Oh! hang it all!"—he stirred with uneasy impatience, and the bamboo rail creaked in his grip—"how am I to put it decently! Anne, my dear, my dear, I don't think one jot the worse of you for what you have told me. I think you deserve the Victoria Cross for owning up. I can guess what it cost you to let your pride go to the wall, and—and all that . . ."

The very baldness of his words seemed to make the large-hearted devotion that prompted them the more evident; and a realisation of the true worth of Dion's character went home to Anne with a force that deepened the bitter intensity of her remorse. She shook her head, unable to speak.

Then he added in quick, passionate entreaty: "Oh! darling—marry me all the same! I would make you care for me; I would do everything in my power to give you happiness, every mortal thing——"

Anne put up her hand to stop him. All the advantages he could offer her seemed non-existent; and, even had they tempted her still, she would never do him the wrong of marrying him when her love was given, however hopelessly, to another man.

She tried to make him understand that the thing was impossible, begged him not to think or speak of it, endeavoured to put her gratitude, her appreciation, her genuine affection for him into words; but it all sounded so banal, so inadequate, that at

last she broke down with a hysterical sob, unnerved by all she had gone through during the past twenty-four hours, worn out, near to exhaustion.

Dion took her hand and leaned towards her protectingly. "There, never mind!" he said, as he might have soothed a child, "we will leave it—I was clumsy. I ought to have waited."

He saw that to press his heart's desire would be cruel as well as useless at present; but he asked her to renew a promise—the same promise she had made to him in the Stapelys' garden among the orange trees on the day of their first meeting in India; he feared no falseness, no deception now! To please him, to comfort him, Anne promised that should she ever find she could return his love she would tell him so without reserve.

If only she could think that such a time could come—that the ache in her heart might some day be stilled or forgotten!

CHAPTER XXIII

BEFORE they left the Mission bungalow that morning, Anne found that matters between herself and Dion had been placed on a very different basis from anything she had anticipated or intended. First, she had not been prepared for Dion's attitude after her confession—she had expected anger, scorn, disgust. Then, during the wakeful, restless hours of the previous night, she had rehearsed the announcement to Mrs. Stapely that her engagement was at an end. What questions would be asked—how uncomfortable it would be! Also she had confused her brain with plans for the future, and with repeated calculations as to whether she could contrive to repay Dion the money for her passage without touching her small capital. And she entertained vague schemes for reducing her debt to him—such as offering her services to some female passenger as companion, maid, or nurse, during the voyage. Only she had no notion how to set about making such an arrangement, and in any case it was probably too late!

Many difficulties had arisen to perplex her; but now Dion disposed of them all. Quite simply, and without awkwardness, he had drawn her intentions from her, and she had found herself talking to him

more as if he were Uncle Richard than the man she had treated so badly! He persuaded her that there was no earthly necessity to tell Mrs. Stapely, or any one else at present, that they were no longer engaged. Surely, there was nothing to prevent their being friends. They had always been friends, great friends, from the time they had first met. They could go on calling each other by their Christian names—hadn't they done it even before they were engaged? And as they had never gone in for making asses of themselves in public, who was to notice any difference? Mrs. Stapely would only make the most unholy fuss, and worry them both out of their senses if they let her behind the scenes; and of course she would chatter at once, and the whole Station would be agog, and it would be most unpleasant, especially for him after Anne was gone! She had much better allow herself to be guided by him till she left Sika, and she must not imagine that he would take the smallest advantage of the position. Her passage money? Come now, Anne would please not be idiotic! Of course, if it would make her happier to pay him back some day, she could do so (Dion knew better than to attempt definite refusal of repayment), and as he meant to come home, all the same, later on, they could discuss the point then; but there was no such desperate hurry about it now. As for working her way home as a nurse, or anything impossible of that sort—— In spite of his unhappy condition Dion laughed aloud at the

very notion, which rather hurt Anne's feelings for the moment, though directly afterwards she knew that the familiar sound of the big, boyish laugh had done her good.

The truth was that Dion had no intention of losing Anne without a very determined struggle. Though at present she was no longer his promised wife, he was still her friend and lover, and when he followed her home he meant to make every effort to win her love, once and for all. If his furlough proved too short for his purpose he would leave the army; and, if by evil chance he failed, at least he could remain near her, ready to help her if she needed him.

Anne had given in to his arguments meekly; and permitted herself to be hoodwinked about the passage money. Of course she would repay him the moment he came home; there were various valuables that had been Granny's, locked away in her boxes at Crivener, that would easily realise the money. She felt too limp to argue; she was only too glad to lean on his advice and support.

With officious importance the cook's boy superintended their departure in the dogcart, and the loading of the gharry that was to follow them with Anne's belongings to the Judge's bungalow. He demanded a testimonial from the Miss-sahib before she left, and was so pertinacious that, in despair, she wrote an appreciation of his culinary powers, and resourcefulness in times of emergency, with the

stump of a pencil on half a sheet of note paper, both produced by the importunate one himself. Subsequently he sold the document in the bazaar for a handsome sum to a scullion friend who had just been dismissed from his situation without a character.

Tabitha was still absent when they started and Anne forgot all about her, engrossed as she was in bidding a sad, silent farewell to the dusty compound, with its two deserted bungalows that must always hold the foremost place in her memory. Dion said little till they got beyond the bazaar, for the streets swarmed with children and loiterers, and the pony, being fresh, needed all his attention. But, once out on the clear road, he asked Anne to tell him her future plans.

"You'll go straight to Crivener, I suppose?" he said, more in persuasion than query.

"Not at first. I shall stay in London for a little while with Mrs. Stapely. I promised her I would. And it will give me an opportunity of looking about for something to live in later——"

"You don't mean to say you're going to try and set up on your own hook?" he interrupted, with dismay. "You could never do it on your income, Anne, especially in London. Why can't you stay at Crivener?"

"It's impossible," Anne said decisively. "I shall go there for a time, of course; Uncle Richard will expect it—but when Aunt Agnes knows I am not

going to be married she will make her displeasure felt! and, anyway, I would rather be independent."

"But, my dear girl—you'll be so hideously poor! I can't stand the idea of it! Why—you've only got something under two hundred a year, isn't it?"

"A hundred and twenty-five, to be accurate," said Anne calmly; "but lots of women in our class live on even less. You remember Miss Bott? She managed all right."

"Oh! Miss Bott!" cried Dion, with contempt, "she had all the instincts of a beggar. It was no real hardship to her."

Anne ignored this unkind criticism of poor Miss Bott. "I thought," she went on tentatively, afraid that Dion would scoff, "that I might get some work. There are charitable societies and associations (I know, because Granny never would subscribe to them) that take helpers, on probation, and if you are any good they give you a salary. I should have enough to keep me while I was training, and at least I should feel I was trying to do some good in the world——"

Dion suppressed his impulse to say that the greatest good she could do in the world would be to marry him; he meant to be wary, not to worry her, not to risk losing her confidence—just to wait and trust to time.

He said nothing in direct opposition to Anne's scheme, but with horror he imagined her in mean surroundings, in cheap lodgings, being bullied by

truculent landladies, going in omnibuses, wearing shabby clothes, perhaps actually wanting food! It was impossible. It could not be permitted. And yet how was he to prevent it? He looked down at the pale, serious face beside him, and knew that for the present he was powerless.

When they arrived at the Judge's bungalow they found Mrs. Stapely packing in the veranda. She was in the midst of a confused collection of tin-lined cases, canvas bags, hold-alls, and mounds of clothes. Babba was scrambling about among the boxes, while his mother made lists of what was to be put inside them. She was glad but not surprised to see Anne.

"Ah! I thought you'd never be able to stand a mission camp!" she exclaimed, in smiling triumph. "Of course you found it totally different from all you've heard about official touring, with big tents, and double sets, and plenty of servants! But I'm delighted you've come back."

Anne offered no contradiction to Mrs. Stapely's surmise as to the reason of her speedy return. She was relieved that her reappearance caused no tiresome comment; and merely said that she had felt the sun a good deal and thought it wiser to return.

Dion did not get out of the trap. He exchanged a few laughing words with Mrs. Stapely, warned Babba to take care he was not packed at the bottom of one of those boxes by mistake, and with a cheery, general "Good-bye," drove off. Anne looked after him with an unhappy sigh. She knew that his good

spirits were only assumed for her sake; it was horrible to her to feel that this morning she had saddened and changed his whole existence, brought such trouble into his clean, glad life—not that she repented having undeceived him, the real wrong lay further back; to-day she had only done what remained in her power to right it.

"Don't look so woe-begone!" said Mrs. Stapely. "If you're like this now, what will you be on the voyage! People will think we're two widows. I believe you came back from camp because you couldn't stay away from him, not really because you found it uncomfortable and felt the sun! Now tell me, do you think I dare roll up these bottles in Babba's overalls, or will they break and ruin everything?"

Miss Crivener entered into the packing question with fervour, thankful for occupation and distraction. Mrs. Stapely found her most helpful, and for the remaining week the two worked hard. Not only did Mrs. Stapely insist on providing for every possible contingency that might arise on the voyage, but all the best things in the bungalow had to be sorted, counted, and locked away. Griff was to be left with only the electro-plate, the everyday crockery and glass, and the old house linen. Even the last new dusters were to be hoarded. "If I leave them out," complained the harassed lady, "the servants will make coats of them for their children. Griff never looks after anything when I am away—

he thinks of nothing but his work and his book. Would you believe it, last year when I was up in the hills," etc.

So the hour came at last when Anne was to leave Sika. Dion had been unable to get off duty to accompany the little party to Bombay; a month ago it would have been easy, but just now there was extra work, and the regiment was short-handed. Anne was not sure if she felt relieved or sorry. The strain of these last days had been hard, with her false position, her heaviness of spirit, her regret and self-blame. She longed for breathing time, for the mental inaction of the journey when she might let her tired mind and heart relax.

She left Sika, as she had arrived, late at night. The yelling native crowd, the smell, the noise, the confusion smote her with painful reminiscence. She almost expected to see Padre Williams thrusting his way with masterful determination through the moving throng; she remembered herself stepping out of the train, elegant, agreeable, an accomplished dissembler, intent on her treacherous errand, hard, unyielding, selfish. . . . Now here was part of her punishment—here in the look on Dion's face; for beneath all his brave show of cheerfulness, and his active concern for the comfort of the travellers, Anne could see the effort to hide the dull aching of the blow she had dealt him. And the rest of her retribution she carried in her own breast—the haunt-

ing memory, the dreary knell of Never! Never! that tolled in her heart night and day.

Babba was already in the carriage with Buria ayah, who was to go with them to Bombay. He was dancing up and down on the seat, screaming to his mother through the window in agitated alarm that she would be left behind. But Mrs. Stapely was bidding her husband a tearful farewell on the platform, and for once Babba's cries were disregarded.

Mr. Draper had come down to the station to wish Miss Crivener God-speed. Mrs. Draper was ailing, he explained; she had somehow contrived to pick up a little chill, and it might have been risky for her to come out, though, to be sure, the night was warm enough. All the same, he himself had thought it safer to wear his woollen comforter that Miss Sophia had so kindly knitted for him. Miss Sophia would be anxious to hear the very last news of Miss Crivener, and he must write to her to-morrow. Mr. Draper hoped that Miss Crivener would now maintain an active interest in mission matters at home, and she must not forget to send them a donation now and again! Next time he and wife went on furlough they would hope to have the pleasure of visiting Miss Crivener—or Mrs. Devasse, as, of course, she would be long before *that* time!

Mr. Draper gave the couple a playful glance. Then he began to cough, and tucked his beard inside

his comforter as a further protection to his throat.

Mrs. Stapely got into the carriage with her handkerchief to her eyes; and her husband kissed his excited little son through the broad open window.

"You must get in, Miss Crivener," somebody said. "The train's just going."

She turned swiftly to Dion. His face looked drawn, his eyes black in the crude lamplight. A sense of helpless desolation fell upon her, a realisation of how vastly she depended on him, of how sorely she would miss his care, and thought, and devotion. For an instant she clung to him desperately, and he kissed her in passionate, wordless parting.

CHAPTER XXIV

"It's the devil!" said Sir Richard Crivener.

Anne was familiar enough with her uncle's favourite expression of annoyance, but to-day, for some unaccountable reason, it suddenly recalled to her the occasion, nearly two years ago now, when he had used it with such vehemence in connection with Granny's financial affairs.

Amused, she contrasted her present surroundings with the room she was visualising in her memory. Here were no Chippendale chairs, no Venetian mirrors, no valuable bronzes, pictures, china, or costly decorations; but just a box of a room with one narrow window, one electric light suspended from the middle of the ceiling above the sturdy little square table that blurted candidly "dining and sitting-room in one." Opposite the entrance (there was no hall) an open door showed a slip of a bedchamber, and another door led into what might have been a cupboard but was called the kitchen. It contained a diminutive gas-stove, a sink, some shelves, and just standing room only for one human being of average proportions. The furniture of the flat was very plain, but everything was useful and good, and an air of comfort had been effected subtly in its

arrangement. The writing-table stood at exactly the right angle for daylight; there were low, broad stools beside the one easy chair and the miniature sofa, so that books, work, smoking paraphernalia could lie within reach. The cushions were large, without frills, and covered with bits of rich material, and every piece of brass and silver in the room shone resplendently. It was more like the quarters of a fastidious, elderly bachelor than the dwelling of a young lady, with its absence of trifles and drapery, its comfortable simplicity, and the excellence of its few contents.

Uncle Richard's burly form looked enormous in the little room, and he seemed afraid to move. He was still breathing heavily, for the flat was four storeys up, and of course no such luxury as a lift was provided for tenants whose rents began at twenty pounds a year! That morning he had journeyed up to London, from Crivener, with instructions from his wife to bring his headstrong niece to her senses; and he was to insist that Anne should accompany him back to Crivener the very next day. Though he was perfectly certain that nothing he could say, or do, would have the smallest influence on the girl's intentions, he had undertaken the mission for the sake of the little outing and the few hours of Anne's company. He had meant to deliver his message as speedily as possible, and then they would go out and enjoy themselves. But now that he had arrived, he was really concerned and distressed at the way in which he discovered Anne

to be living; and he did not believe her when she explained that though the flats had originally been built for artisans, they were now tenanted almost entirely by gentlefolk, and, moreover, were exceedingly difficult to secure.

"I only got mine by the luckiest chance," she told him, "there is such a demand for them; and they are in such a good position one can always let if one wants to."

"Then you'd better let at once," advised Uncle Richard. "Poof! Good Lord, those steps! I haven't recovered the climb yet. There must be several thousands of them. No wonder you've lost flesh, Anne, my dear."

He moved cautiously to the open window, and put his head out. The July sun was beating down on the asphalt of the enclosed court below. A rattle of milk-cans, and the echo of voices rose on the hot, still air, and mingled with the ceaseless hum of traffic in the street beyond the archway that formed the entrance to the huge block of flats. Sir Richard drew in his head, taking great care not to hit it against the window-frame; there was not much room to spare

"It might be a bear-pit on a big scale!" he said in disgust, and dropped himself heavily into the arm-chair. "Agnes is in a frightful way about all this nonsense of yours," he went on, with an attempt at severity, "and I can tell you it's been the devil at Crivener ever since she got your letter saying what you were doing, and that you wouldn't

go back! Of course," he added, in loyal haste, "she's quite right to be in a rage. You've no business to be living in an attic, and messing about among vice and vermin in the slums, and calling it work! It ain't respectable—not for a good-looking gell like you. If you were an ugly old maid, now, it would be a different matter, and I'm sure there are enough of them, in all conscience, to carry on this sort of job without *you* joining in! And then, you see, Agnes don't like the idea of people knowing what you're up to. She says it looks as if we grudged you a home. It's two months now since you went off on this wild-goose chase; and you are to come back with me to Crivener to-morrow."

Anne smiled at Uncle Richard's artless betrayal of the real cause of his wife's perturbation.

"Now, dear, you know as well as I do that I can't live with Aunt Agnes. I stood it as long as I could. While she thought I was going to marry Captain Devasse I was an angel—and so was she; but the moment I told her I'd broken off my engagement—well, she wasn't quite so affectionate, was she? And anyway, I would rather live by myself, even if she and I were bosom friends. I'd made up my mind to live alone even before I left India."

"All the same, Agnes is a deuced good woman. Look what she does for the village, and the church, and the parson, and how she keeps 'em all up to the mark! She means well, whatever she *says*."

"Of course she does," soothed Anne, "but we don't get on together, we don't understand each other; that's all. You can tell her you found me very well, and quite happy and comfortable, and that she need not worry about me. Also that, as I don't go into Society, nobody is any the wiser as to my doings."

"But you're *not* looking well, Anne. You're too thin. And as to comfort—you couldn't swing a cat in this hole of a place. What do you do for servants?"

"A very nice woman comes in every morning for two or three hours——"

"And who cooks your meals?" interrupted Sir Richard fiercely.

"I do, if I'm at home. If I'm out, I buy them," said Anne, laughing. "I generally am out all day, rushing about investigating cases for my Charitable Association people."

"Good heavens, child, what has come over you! You never used to be like this. You must have picked up all these crazy ideas from those missionary creatures out in India. I always heard they did more harm than good! And breaking off your engagement to a decent fellow with pots of money, too! It's enough to make the old lady turn in her grave. By Jove it is!"

"Oh! it's no use trying to make you understand," said Anne wearily.

"Well, I'm blessed if I can make it out. You

used to think of nothing but your frocks and hats, and going about and amusing yourself, just like any other rational young woman. Why, you and the old lady would have gone to a tom-cat fight in the old days rather than to no show at all!"

"Look here, dear," said Anne persuasively, "let's drop the subject and go out. We needn't be reduced to a tom-cat fight; the Park is quite as amusing at this time of the year."

Sir Richard sighed. "Well, it don't seem much use talking to you," he said resignedly. "I suppose I must square Agnes somehow to-morrow; but she'll be awfully put out. She said you were to come back with me. You must remember she's waited two months for you to beg her pardon as it is."

"I'll beg her pardon as much as she likes, but I am not going back to live at Crivener. I'll come for my holiday next year if she'll have me. This year, of course, I don't get one. I'm doing other people's work that they may get away, or else I mightn't have been taken on so easily." She rose and squeezed between Sir Richard and the table. "I'm going to put on my hat."

"But we shall meet a crowd of people we know if we go into the Park, and they'll ask questions."

"Let them," said Anne, disappearing into her bedroom, "and we'll tell them stories."

A little later she returned in a gown that shortly before Granny's death had cost, in Paris, more than a year's rent of Anne's present abode; and there-

fore had needed but slight alteration to bring it entirely up to date.

"By Jove, Anne!" chuckled Sir Richard, scanning his niece with approval from her "picture" hat to the tips of her pointed toes. "You don't look much like a sister of mercy, or a hallelujah lass, or whatever you call yourself!"

And indeed it might have been the Miss Crivener of two years ago from Eaton Place who walked up Sloane Street this July evening at her uncle's side—slim, graceful, well dressed, with the little exclusive air peculiarly her own. But her associates of the old days would have noticed a puzzling difference in Anne Crivener all the same. Her expression held a sympathy and softness that before had been absent; there was a sweet depth in the eyes that had learnt to look with compassionate understanding upon suffering, want, and sorrow. A new strength, added by victory over self, lay in the curves of her mouth and chin.

People turned to glance again as they passed the distinguished-looking couple. "What a handsome father and daughter!" they said. "Wonder who they are!" For in spite of the redness of his skin, and the bulk of his person, Sir Richard looked "Somebody", and Anne was like him—essentially a Crivener.

As they strolled and sat in the Park, she enjoyed the amazed greetings of old acquaintances, though she felt rather like a ghost when they inquired if

she were really herself, and plied her with questions as to where she had been buried all this time? But India accounted for everything, and as it seemed obvious that she was living at Crivener, and had only come up for a day or two with her uncle, they missed making what would have been such an interesting discovery—that she had established herself in a two-roomed flat, on a microscopic income, and was working on behalf of a Charitable Society among the poor!

That night uncle and niece enjoyed a dinner at a fashionable restaurant, and "did" a theatre afterwards; and Anne, wearing a becoming gown, seated in the stalls among the well-dressed, well-fed, light-hearted audience, could almost have imagined that Granny was at her side again, and that the past two years were a dream.

To the end, as she saw him off at the station early next morning, Sir Richard urged her to come back to Crivener, but without effect.

"What I'm to say to Agnes I don't know—and what'll she say to me?" he shouted resentfully, as the train started. "It's the devil!"

And Anne shook her head, and smiled, and waved cheerfully, as long as the ruddy, good-natured face could be seen at the window. Go back to Crivener? Even if she had the wish to go, even if she and Aunt Agnes had adored each other, there was a very strong reason, apart from her work, to keep her in London at present, a reason she had care-

fully concealed from Uncle Richard—viz., that Dion Devasse was on his way home.

Last mail his letter had told her that his leave, already twice delayed, had been granted at last. He gave her the approximate date and hour when he expected to arrive in London, and said that he should drive straight to see her after leaving his luggage at a hotel, unless, of course, he got in at any impossible time.

To-day was Saturday; Monday morning he would probably be here. Anne looked forward more than she actually realised to seeing him again. It made her restless and excited, the hours dragged, and the case she had to investigate, after Uncle Richard's departure, failed to lift her mind from her own concerns, for it proved to be one of flagrant imposture.

The nearer the approach of a looked-for event, the more slowly the time seems to pass; and by Sunday evening Anne was wondering what on earth she was to do with herself till bedtime! She could not fix her attention on a book, she could not settle down to write letters, her clothes needed no attention. Her flat was as neat and bright and attractive as she could make it, for the afternoon had been spent in rubbing, dusting, cleaning, rearranging in preparation for Dion's first visit. She sat down idly on the sofa, and then noticed suddenly that the air was full of the clang and clamour of church bells; and though Anne had been to church that

morning, and was not given to over-zealous attendance, she rose now with alacrity, welcoming the suggestion.

The streets were full of people as she emerged from beneath the archway; and Anne's progress was much hindered by leisurely couples that strolled along in apparently contented silence—typical London Sunday-evening couples—well-grown young women with healthy skins and pleasant faces, arm-in-arm with miserable, pallid, under-sized youths barely out of their teens. Anne thought of Dion as she walked behind one of these knock-kneed specimens, thought of his splendid physique, his handsome brown face, his brave blue eyes; and as she stepped into the roadway to circumvent the slow-pacing pair in front of her, who seemed to spread themselves right across the pavement, a hansom dashed round the corner, and in it Dion himself was sitting!

Anne had a confused impression of orders being shouted to the driver, of the alarming clatter of a sudden pull-up, and a tall, tweed-clad, straw-hatted figure alighting with a spring before her; of her hands being seized and an excited voice crying "At last! at last!" while Sunday couples stood about and gazed at the scene, then passed on, their languid interest dead; and Dion still stood smiling down with rapture into her eyes.

"A whole day earlier than I expected!" he said jubilantly. "Where were you going?"

"To church; but it doesn't matter; we'll go back."

How he would have exulted could he have known that she was going to church more to pass a fraction of the time till he should arrive than for any other reason!

"To church? No, don't go back; I'll come with you. It's a hundred years since I saw the inside of a church in England, and I'd love to go with you the very first thing. It would be a sort of good omen! And," he added hopefully, "we can come out before the sermon."

"Come along, then," said Anne; and a few minutes brought them to the church door, Dion talking all the time.

Within the building all was cool, and dim, and restful, with harmonious blending of rich colours and the fragrance of tall, white lilies. They took their seats near the door; and as Anne knelt with Dion beside her, and the voluntary wandered softly from the organ, she felt happier than she had done since she had left India. A feeling of peace and security came to her. It was as if the memory enshrined in her heart were separating mysteriously from her earthly existence,—and becoming part only of her spirit. Dion was with her in the flesh, strong, faithful, human; and now the other face and form that was so seldom absent from her thoughts, seemed to rise as far above all contact with material life and love as the very saints with God. . . .

She stood throughout the Psalms like one in a dream, while Dion sang them triumphantly; to him they were songs of rejoicing. She sat down mechanically, with the rest of the congregation, as a surpliced figure moved to the lectern and turned the leaves of the big Bible, adjusting the embroidered markers. Then the opening words of the lesson rang out clear and sonorous:

"The voice of one crying in the Wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight."

Instantly the lofty English church, with its pillars and aisles and vaulted roof, its colour and fragrance, melted from Anne's sight, and she was back in a bare building that had undecorated walls and simple accessories, and the hard, bright glare of an Eastern sun streaming through its unstained windows. She was gazing at a figure in the pulpit, at a rapt, earnest face, at grey eyes that gleamed with the faith and courage of the soul behind them; she was listening, breathless, to a voice that vibrated with fervour and enthusiasm. . . .

A touch on her arm brought her back with violence to the present, and the vision was gone. She became conscious that the lesson was over, that everybody was standing up, that the Magnificat had begun. Dion whispered something to her, and she saw, as through a mist, a late-comer standing in the aisle asking, in mute apology, to be allowed to pass into the seat beyond her own. She felt confused

and stifled, she wanted light and air, and hastily she signified her wish to go.

As they stepped into the street, Dion turned to look at her. "Nothing the matter?" he asked anxiously.

Anne stood for a moment, dazed and uncertain. Then the soft air of the warm, dusty, London evening, the rattle of a passing hansom and the thunder of a motor omnibus restored her self-possession.

"No, nothing really the matter. I felt a little giddy. I'm all right now."

"We'll have a cab——"

"No, no; it's only a few minutes' walk. It will do me good."

She gathered up her skirts and moved forward, and presently she was trying to assuage Dion's horror and indignation that she should be obliged to climb such an infernal lot of steps every time she returned to her home. And he was so palpably distressed by the smallness of the rooms, and her mode of life, though he tried to conceal his feelings, that to console him she was obliged to affect an exaggerated pride in her tiny quarters. She settled him down with a cigarette, and answered all his questions with friendly compliance.

After a time he allowed, reluctantly, that to make her home at Crivener seemed out of the question. "But you can't expect me," he said, "to feel pleased that you should have to live like this. Of course it's angelic of you to work among all these wretched

people you tell me about, but surely it's very dangerous? You might catch diseases, or be robbed, or murdered. I'll give you as much money as ever you want for them, but can't you get somebody else to do the slumming part of the business? You aren't looking as fit as you ought, you know, Anne. Are you sure," he hesitated, feeling a delicacy over the question, "that you always get enough to eat?"

But Anne laughed at his fears and objections. She declared that she was quite well, and never caught diseases, and there was no fear of her being robbed and murdered. As for food, she always ate a great deal too much, and she was going to prove to Dion that she certainly did not starve herself, by giving him supper to-night, although he was an unexpected guest. There was cold chicken and salad, cheese, and a cake, and some really good claret in the cupboard. Uncle Richard had sent it to her soon after she settled in the flat, without Aunt Agnes knowing anything about it. And Dion should see what excellent coffee she could make to complete the feast.

"I thought you might have come out and dined with me somewhere," said Dion, but the prospect of a picnic up in this eyrie, alone with Anne, was so alluring that he did not press his own invitation; he would repeat it for to-morrow night.

He helped her to lay the table, and opened the wine, talking all the time, and when the little meal was finished he insisted on "washing up," though

Anne assured him she always left that for the woman who came in the morning; and he broke a plate, and spilt a lot of water, and thoroughly enjoyed himself.

Then, as they sat in semi-darkness, with the window wide open, Anne said it was her turn now to ask questions. She must hear more about Sophia and Mr. Williams, and the rest of the Sika news. But all the time, behind her interested inquiries, and ease of tone, another question was calling and reverberating in her heart till it almost seemed as if Dion must hear it, too.

"Yes, Sophia's all right," he repeated. "I told you I saw her before I started. I went to the Mission House on purpose. Yes, she looked exactly the same, and she sent you a present. It's in my cabin box. I'll bring it here to-morrow. It's mats, I think, or a bag, or something, I forget what she said. And there's a bundle of cards, too, that she painted herself and wants you to sell for the Mission; but don't worry about that, I'll buy them, and you can send her the money. I thought old Williams looked rather played out, but I suppose Sophia writes pretty often and tells you everything."

"She writes about once a month," said Anne slowly, "and tells me all she can think of."

Yet, with rigid observance, Sophia still held to her promise concerning the mention of Oliver Wray. Never once had she even alluded to him.

"She told me of poor Mrs. Draper's death," Anne

went on. "I remember Mr. Draper said she wasn't well when he saw me off, but somehow one never expected either of them to be really bad, they made such a fuss about their health."

"I should say that, sooner or later, Sophia would probably take the deceased lady's place," said Dion carelessly; "Mr. Draper has already gone to live in the little bungalow in the compound, the one Wray used to have, you know."

Anne sat quite still. Her pulses began to throb, and she was thankful the light had not been turned on. She waited till she felt sure she could speak evenly. "I remember Sophia was always rather weak about Mr. Draper! I hope it will come off, if it would make her happy." She paused to steady her voice again, and asked quickly, "Where has Mr. Wray gone to live, then?"

"Oh! didn't Sophia tell you? She was full of it when I saw her that last time. I hadn't heard it myself before. It seems Wray got a crank into his head that he could convert the Hindu more easily if he went about among them as a fakir, or a beggar, or something fantastic of that kind! They say he gave all his things away, and started off in a sort of friar's get-up, with nothing but a stick and a Bible, to wander about all over the country preaching!" Dion threw the end of his cigarette into the fireplace and turned towards Anne. She was sitting far back in the corner of the little sofa, and it was growing so dark he could hardly see her out-

line. "Sophia said her father did everything in his power to stop it," he went on; "old Williams didn't approve. But Stapely—I was talking to Stapely about it afterwards—*he* said he thought the fellow was quite right—that Wray would be presenting an aspect of our religion to the natives that would appeal to them, one they would understand and appreciate, and that now he'd probably get into a thousand places which would always have been barred to him as a sahib. Still, I don't know—I should say myself he was clean off his chump."

Anne made a sudden movement, and Dion thought she spoke. "What?" he said.

Then to his dismay he found she had hidden her face in the cushion, and that she was sobbing. He rose quickly, and bent over her in alarm. "Anne, what is it, darling? What have I said? Tell me!" he entreated.

But he knew she did not heed him, that she was hardly conscious of his presence. He drew back, frightened, perplexed.

"Anne!" he said helplessly.

And then, as he stood there, listening to the pitiful little sounds that caused him such sore distress, he began to understand. His mind went back slowly, piece by piece, over the past, till much became clearer to him that before had been hard to define.

In his memory rose the picture of Oliver Wray as he had first seen him, preaching in the bazaar,

with the sunset glow on his bare head, and the light of inspiration in his eyes. And Anne had loved him!—Ah! poor Anne! He bent again and touched her shoulder, as though he would soothe her trouble if he could.

She raised her head. "Dion," she whispered, "I can't say anything. I can't explain——"

"But I think I know," he said gently. "You cared for him—very much, Anne?"

The wistful tenderness in his voice drew all her heart out to him. She groped for his hand, and he knelt at her side; and presently she was telling him everything, telling him how she had suffered, and striven, and conquered; how it was through her love unbetrayed, unspoken, for the man whose life was dedicated so resolutely to his cause, that she had learned to be brave and true. . . . And then in slow, faltering words she tried to convey to Dion the sense of healing and comfort that had fallen upon her as they knelt in the church together that evening, how the shadow of pain seemed to lift and change, merging into a spiritual peace.

She paused, and in the significant silence that followed, as he looked into the future with confidence and hope, Dion did not fail to acknowledge, humbly, ungrudgingly, how deep was his own debt, also, to Oliver Wray.

THE END

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